



Durham E-Theses

The role of children in governance

Woollcombe, David Rupert

How to cite:

Woollcombe, David Rupert (1997) *The role of children in governance*, Durham theses, Durham University.
Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/4965/>

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

The copyright of this thesis rests
with the author. No quotation
from it should be published
without the written consent of the
author and information derived
from it should be acknowledged.

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN GOVERNANCE

by

DAVID RUPERT WOOLLCOMBE

THESIS PRESENTED FOR A MASTERS OF ARTS DEGREE

[Final Revised Text]

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

Geography Department

March 1997

- 1 DEC 1998



THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN GOVERNANCE

ABSTRACT

The subject is introduced with a review of the studies of youth citizenship by British authors, in which the transitions that a young person makes from dependency to independence are examined. A child is defined as a minor in British law, or any person under the age of 18 years. The thesis explores the history of attempts to involve children and young people in the governance of institutions which affect their lives and attempts to draw conclusions which may help in designing future attempts to do so.

The various international agreements of the last seven years are reviewed in which governments agreed to confer on young people the right to participate in decision-making. Also analysed is the performance of the UN agencies that drafted those agreements in implementing them in their own projects. At this level, the culture of young people and that of large international bureaucracies are found to be seriously incompatible. It is also seen that most governments do not fully understand what they are signing in these agreements: none have fully implemented their commitments in fact.

Examples of successful involvement of children in governance are found at the local level. Young people have formed impressive children's councils in schools and municipalities in France, Austria, Germany, the USA and the UK. In the USA, several large companies have also experimented with children's boards, as have some foundations and non-profit organisations. In the UK, successful children's participation in governance is reviewed in relation to two councils, one in Derbyshire, one in Devon. Changes in UK law are also examined.

The final section of the thesis examines the author's own experience in setting up and running an organisation that specialises in working with young people to create platforms from which young people can express their concerns about global issues. He traces the history of the organisation - how its first event revealed the potential of fruitful participation between adults and children, through the development of different projects to today where young people run every aspect of the organisation in partnership with him. From this experience, twelve principles for a methodology of children's participation in governance are proposed.

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN GOVERNANCE

PREFACE

This thesis came about as a result of several conversations about my experience of creating and running an organisation called Peace Child International. Started in 1981, the organisation grew as various other agencies of the United Nations were taking an interest in youth participation in various forms. The UN Environment Programme was starting up its Global Youth Fora. UNICEF was busy drafting the Convention on the Rights of the Child. International Youth Year(1985), run by the UN Youth Unit, was proclaiming the right of young people to participate in their governance. The secretariat drafting Agenda 21 was composing a special chapter on the role of young people in the sustainable development of society. While all these commitments were being made by governments, young people's position in society was little changed. The general public perceived children as glorified domestic pets to be "seen and not heard".

In the Peace Child organisation, young people were genuinely honoured as full partners - in the planning and development of projects. In the scripting and performance of musical plays, and the writing, design, illustration and editing of books, and in the raising of funds. As the founder and director of this organisation, I was interested in the contrast between the expressed commitment by governments and their failure to translate those commitments into active policy, and the daily practice of partnership with children that I was experiencing running of the Peace Child organisation. The source of this thesis was a desire to link the experience of my practice with the expressed intentions of governments.

In the course of my work, I also met several other youth leaders who were interested in the commitments being made by governments, and how they might be implemented in communities to the benefit of both children and other members of society. In particular, I was impressed by the work of the Children's Environment Research Group at City University of New York; Danaan Parry and his work with the Earth Stewards organisation in Washington State, USA; Kristin Eskeland and her Voice of the Children organisation; Werner Greis and Miclos Banhidi of the United Games organisation; Ellen Brogren, Nina Lynn and Theresa Vanini of the Children of the Earth Network, Annie Brody, Judith Thompson, Professor Ewan Anderson, and many others who have talked through these issues with me. Their input has been invaluable.

I have been particularly interested in the methodology of children's participation, trying to define what techniques and approaches worked in practice and how my experience might be articulated in a way that could be helpful to governments and others interested in implementing the international commitments they had already made. This thesis represents my first effort. I hope that a doctoral thesis will allow me to continue the research.

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN GOVERNANCE

CONTENTS

Chapter	Title	Page
1	Introduction	5
	1.1 Definitions	5
	1.2 The theme of this study	6
2	International agreements	13
	2.1 The Convention on the Rights of the Child	13
	2.2 Agenda 21	14
	2.3 World Programme of Action for Youth	15
	2.4 World Summit for Children declaration	16
	2.5 Global infrastructure proposed by youth	17
	2.6 Supporting arguments	18
3	International experience	24
	3.1 The UNEP Global Youth Forum	24
	3.2 UNICEF's record	28
	3.3 UNESCO's Children's Summit	29
	3.4 The UN Youth Unit	31
	3.5 Conclusion	32
4	Experiences with children in governance at local level	34
	4.1 Austria and Germany	35
	4.2 France	36
	4.3 United States of America	37
	4.4 Developing countries	40
	4.5 United Kingdom	44
	4.6 Conclusion	50
5	Analysis of the evolution of Peace Child and its experience in young people's participation	53
	5.1 History of Peace Child Trust	53
6.	Twelve principles of good practice	68
	6.1 Principles I - XII	68
	6.2 Conclusion	83
7	The need for further inquiry	85
	7.1 The plateau of experience	85
	7.2 Avenues for further study	88
	Bibliography & List of Abbreviations	90
	Appendix I: Questionnaire:	92

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definitions: This study is about the role of children in governance. Governance is simply defined as the process by which society is governed. Thus we are studying the role of children in the process by which society is governed. The definition of children has been clarified by the Convention on the Rights of the Child[CRC]: its first article defines "a child as any human being under the age of 18."¹

The use of the term "Child" in the CRC definition above reflects the absence of "children" from the process of drafting of the Convention. Any person roughly over the age of 12, from any culture - whether using the word child, or niños, enfant or kinder - resents being referred to as a child. They refer to themselves as young people, teenagers, kids or students. Jones & Wallace² avoid the issue of age-based definitions of children by describing youth and childhood as a series of transitions, thus:

- the school-to-work transition - moving from full-time education to full-time participation in the labour market;
- the domestic transition - moving from the family of origin (parents) to the family of destination (marriage, one's own children)
- the housing transition - away from residence with one's parents, to independent residence;"²

Lansdown describes this series of transitions as "the transition from dependency to in-dependency."³ The child's status as a "dependent" - so-defined in UK law - means that a child has little chance to exercise his/her role as a citizen except through those on whom he/she is dependent. Marshall and other writers of the 1950s defined children as "citizens in waiting"⁴ - unable to enter into contracts, get married, find employment, receive benefits, accept medical care or even choose which parent to live with in the event of a divorce. In this view, children are completely dependent on the views of others.

However, as Coles⁵ points out, the UK society of which Marshall was writing has changed out of all recognition. In 1974, 61 per cent of 16-year olds had jobs; in 1994, 12 per cent had jobs, the rest being in full-time education. Many more children had experienced divorce, re-marriage or growing up with a single parent: the number of single parent families has grown from 570,000 (1971) to 1,270,000 (1991). The number

of re-marriages has grown from 37,000 (1961) to 148,000 (1991).⁵ This change led the authors of the Gulbenkian Report⁶ on "Effective Government Structures for Children" boldly to assert:

"Despite their immaturity, children have equal status to adults as members of the human race. They are individuals, not the possessions of parents, not products of the State, not people-in-the-making..."⁶

Such a re-definition of childhood is received wisdom today. It represents a tremendous departure from the received wisdom of earlier times where in the Mary Poppins vision of an idealised family, children were meant to be seen but not heard. It is even further from the Kenneth Grahame evocation of a "Golden Age" where childhood involved dream days by river banks, cared for by the ever-present loving mother or nanny in white crinoline carrying parasols.⁷ Yet much of English law is still rooted in that earlier vision of children, which is why Gulbenkian argues that Government structures for children need changing.

Though the arguments against an age-based definition of children are convincing, logic dictates that the transitions be age-determined. Thus, for the purposes of this study, a child is defined as a person who is under 18. One who does not vote. A minor in English Law. What will be examined, therefore, are the roles which society offers to those who do not have any hand in the formal creation of the process by which they are governed.

It must be acknowledged that, in most of the study, the older end of this age range is under consideration. As a natural reflection of the distaste in which most of this age hold the term "children", I have preferred to use the generic terms, "young people" or "youth". In both cases, the term refers to those under the age of 18, though the word "youth" also embraces the older age group included in the UN definition of youth as people aged 15-25 years.

1.2 The Theme of this study: In this study, I shall

- explore the history of attempts to involve young people in governance,
- recount the primary difficulties that have been uncovered by these experiments,
- conduct a critical analysis of my own experience of the evolu-

tion of Peace Child International's work in involving children in the governance of both its project and organisation.

finally ° to draw up from all these experiences some principles that may assist in the design of future attempts to involve children in governance.

The review of the history will begin with an analysis of the international agreements which have instructed governments to give young people a role in decision-making. The experience of the various UN agencies that sponsored some of those agreements will then be analysed. The experience of various local governments and agencies in different countries will be analysed to assess the problems they have faced, and the solutions they have implemented to deal with them.

The experience of Peace Child outlines the key experiences that this author has had in the field. They are necessarily personal, but they point to real situations that have convinced this author that there are methodologies that can be employed in working with young people which make the process more effective, and also that there are situations which must be guarded against.

Underpinning much of this analysis is a philosophy which is key to all successful work in this field. That philosophy may be simply stated thus:

"If you give a child responsibility, generally they will behave responsibly. If you deny a child responsibility, they are more likely to behave irresponsibly."⁸

Rutter⁹ in his study of behaviour patterns in English schools discovered that schools which gave the most responsibility for behaviour to students themselves were generally the most stable and best behaved. Those with authoritarian teachers "shrieking orders from the touchline"¹⁰ were those that had problems with repeat offenders, bullying etc.

This philosophy goes back to the liberal tradition of John Stuart Mill¹⁰ which asserts that for a society to work, it must involve the full participation of all its citizens. Dr Tariq Banuri, president of the Sustainable Development Research Institute, called the inclusion of young people in decision-making "part of the process of responsibilitising the whole of society for its collective future."¹¹

The idea of "responsibilitising" children is supported by several

major studies. The Elton Committee¹² of inquiry into youth participation in the Youth Service reported that "schools which give pupils positive responsibilities tend to achieve better standards of behaviour.... Children are likely to react to being given responsibility by acting responsibly."¹² An Advisory Centre on Education study¹³ reported: "Our survey demonstrates that schools programmes which aim to engender personal responsibility work in practice."¹³ A Merseyside Education Authority report¹¹ noted "marked improvement in teacher-pupil relationships as a result of effective student councils."¹⁴ Jones and Wallace¹⁵ state -

"We would argue that this process of democratisation should be extended to young people too. If they are to gain any sense of the obligations of citizenship, they must be treated as citizens and granted rights of citizenship."¹⁵

This sense of alienation from political structures as a result of the lack of responsibility afforded to young people is a recurring theme in all academic studies of this field. The figures on non-participation in elections¹⁶ amongst the 18-25 year old age group are alarming in many countries: less than a third registered in the USA; only 40 per cent voting in the UK, and only 55 per cent in Australia where voting is made compulsory by law . Emma Forrest, an 18-year old columnist for the London Sunday Times explains it thus:

"Everyone has a brief flirtation with politics but, like Barbies and Enid Blyton, you grow out of it. Most of my friends are smart enough to know they can't make a difference. The Labour leader looks like a game-show host, and Amnesty has been judged too political to advertise on TV. British teenagers are so jaded by the time they are old enough to vote, the title of Ken Livingstone's book seems not inflammatory but just plain truth: *"If Voting Changed Anything. They'd Abolish It."*¹⁷

It is arguably to fight this sense of alienation that is the most powerful reason for setting up positive, participatory ways for young people to be introduced to political structures.

Another reason is that by excluding them, children experience helplessness in the face of government initiatives. Graham Joyce¹⁸ in his review of children's participation begins his study by reminding the reader of the training of the Indian elephant: the young elephant is tied to a stout tree and spends many hours trying to free itself and/or uproot the

tree. Eventually, it gives up. Having learned the pointlessness of struggle, the elephant can there-after be safely tethered using a small stake which it could pull up at any moment, but does not because of the memory of the futility of the earlier struggle. "People are not elephants," explains Joyce, "but this example of learned helplessness helps explain what happens to young people's decision-making capacities when responsibility is taken away from them."¹⁸ The process of "decision-hoarding" by parents and teachers actually obstructs the maturing process of young people. It stunts their growth.

In the broadest sense, creating a voice for children in governance can be seen, amongst other things, as creating a platform from which to raise those issues that determine the survival of our planet for future generations. In a world that is consuming 40 per cent of the energy transmitted by the sun,¹⁹ and 30 per cent more resources than our planet creates every year,²⁰ it is essential for governance to recognise the needs of future generations. Democracies, in general, cannot deliver this for, though most parents bear in mind their children's future when casting a vote, they are more likely to be influenced by the promise of policies that will improve their own lives in the present than those that might improve the lives of those living 30-40 years hence. Future generations do not vote thus policies that will affect life on earth centuries hence are likely not to be addressed by candidates at the hustings at all. For this reason, traditional democratic process is unlikely to be a good guardian of the sustainability of our planet. However, if the young people who stand to inherit the benefits or the problems created by current governments are more centrally involved in the democratic process, they are more likely to represent those future interests. If they have been educated about the nature of the threats to the future survival of the planet, they are likely to draw the attention of politicians to these issues in the democratic process. This could be construed to be another major reason for including them.

Jones and Wallace²¹ provide other arguments in their "Life Course Approach to Citizenship". They explain that citizenship has always been full of inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, social origin, wealth, disability etc. and that therefore inequality due to age is to be expected. In the case of women, citizenship can pass from independence, to dependence (marriage, dependence on a male bread-winner) to independence

(widowhood). Thus citizenship evolves during a life-course and young people's citizenship should not be seen as a carbon copy of citizenship in another stage of life. That evolution is particularly notable in relation to young people. In the UK, progress to full adult citizenship, a child passes through 22-stages between the age of 11, when they achieve the right to take on part-time employment, to the age of 24 when they achieve full welfare benefit rights.

Harris²² argues that for a child's citizenship to be defined by parents distorts the nature of citizenship and introduces a false understanding about the nature of citizenship in the mind of the child and parent alike. The child can, and frequently does, assume unhealthy and unethical power over their parents:

"If the parent is seen as socially responsible for the child and pays all his/her fines; if the child's behaviour is regarded as a measure of the moral and personal worth of the parent, then the power of the child becomes enormous."²²

It would be logical to argue that a child should be enabled and empowered to assume citizenship responsibilities for themselves. The Gulbenkian Report states that

" - to pursue any other course creates a society in danger of infantilising children, of assuming an incapacity long past the date at which they are more than capable. It is a matter of common sense and the instinctive good practice of many parents and professionals working with children to listen to them and to encourage them to take responsibility for decisions wherever possible. The outcomes are usually better and, if even things go wrong, learning from mistakes is an essential part of development."²³

The report goes on to recommend a lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16, with a corresponding lowering of the age that candidates can stand for parliament, currently 21. It also recommends the inclusion of young people on many more bodies that recommend action on behalf of young people. The youngest person on the National Curriculum Council which sets curricula for schools nationwide is 48 at the time of writing!

Coles²⁴ puts forward some strong economic arguments for the involvement of young people in social responsibilities. The costs of failure are tremendously high: £200 million in custody costs for young offenders in 1994 not including the costs of court time, legal aid, lost income, and the increasing costs over time that result from the recidivism which is a high statistical inevitability as a result of young people's attendance at

these "universities of crime".

As will be seen later in this study²⁵, many children in the developing world are independent long before they reach any of the statutory age targets for citizenship. They are often economically active contributing considerably to the family income or work-load. In most developing countries, young people are expected to take on the role of carer either for younger children, or for the old. In such countries, there are also many children who are completely independent of the family unit from an early age, living on the street, or in orphanages. In such cases, the imperative for social involvement is more urgent, especially for those in difficult circumstances, such as victims of war, bonded labour or those engaged in prostitution. Often such children face a choice between accepting their responsibilities or not surviving.

The International Community is aware of these issues and has spent much of the last fifteen years deliberating upon them. They have come up with a series of agreements and commitments which, on the face of it, provide a very firm foundation for governments to take action to "responsibilise" children.

REFERENCES

1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/128, 20/11/89, UN Blue Book VII The United Nations and Human Rights 1945-'95 P. 334
2. Jones, G. and Wallace, C. Youth Family and Citizenship, Open University. 1992, Page 13
3. Lansdown, G. Taking Part IPPR, 1996, Page 7
4. Marshall, T.H. Citizenship and Social Class, CUP 1950, Page 79.
5. Coles, Bob, Youth and Social Policy UCL Press, 1995, Page 58
6. Effective Government Structures for Children, Gulbenkian 1996, P. 5
7. Grahame, K. The Golden Age Heineman, 1894
8. Woollcombe, D. Special Focus Report on Youth, Rio+5 Report, Earth Council, 1997
9. Rutter, M.E. Fifteen Thousand Hours London Open Books 1979, P.69
10. Mill, John Stuart, On Liberty, Oxford University Press, Page 47
11. Banuri, T. quoted in Rescue Mission : Planet Earth, Kingfisher 1994, Page 89
12. Thompson, Lord Effective Youth Participation in the Youth Service, HMSO 1982, Page 38
13. Advisory Centre on Education, Student Responsibilities, Occasional Papers No. 16, January 1992, Page 21
14. Merseyside Education Authority, Interim Report 1988, Page 15
15. Jones, G. and Wallace, C. Youth Family and Citizenship, Open University. 1992, Page 158

16. New Labour Magazine, June 1997, Page 7
17. Sunday Times, October 7th 1995, News Review Section II, Page 3
18. Joyce, G. Taking the Wraps of Participation, Youth Clubs UK. '90 P. 2
19. Vitousek, P. Stanford University Review, 1986
20. Rees & Wackernagel, Our Ecological Footprints, New Society Publishers, 1996
21. Jones and Wallace, op.cit. Page 149
22. Harris, R.M. Social Security and the Transition to Adulthood, Journal of Social Policy, Volume VII, No 3, September, 1988, Page 31
23. Gulbenkian, op. cit.
24. Coles, Bob, Youth and Social Policy UCL Press, 1995, Page 32
25. See Chapter Four, below - Page 40;

Chapter Two INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

The last seven years have seen four major international agreements calling for the participation of children in the machinery of domestic government. Each has been enthusiastically endorsed and/or signed by governments and each has resulted in the setting up of some institutional machinery to ensure that they are implemented. The purpose of this section is to show that there is a serious gap between the signed intention and effective implementation.

2.1 The Convention on the Rights of the Child: Laws conferring the right of disenfranchised young people under the age of majority to participate in political and legal processes derive from the Convention on the Rights of the Child which achieved legal status on September 3rd 1990 after it had been ratified by a third of UN member states. It has now been signed by 187 nations, a record for any United Nations Convention.

The text relevant to children's participation is contained in Articles 12 & 13:

"States Parties (*ie. state governments that are a party to this convention*) shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

"For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child either directly, or through a representative, or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law."²⁶

"The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

"The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

- a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others - or -
- b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals."²⁷

During the drafting the Convention, it was clear that the authors of Article 12 were concerned with children experiencing divorce and family

separation. However, it was pointed out that issues like the siting of a nuclear waste dump was a "matter affecting the child". Therefore, it was understood by the signatories to the convention that there would now be a legal requirement for governments, local and national to listen to the concerns of minors on issues that hitherto they would not have been required to.

The matter of freedom of expression is critical as it amounts to a Freedom of Information act for children, enabling to receive information about issues that could have previously been denied to them. For signatory governments, this article enables children to become equal to adult citizens in the area of access to, and free expression of, information. Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 acknowledges its debt to the Convention by instructing governments to "take active steps to ensure its early implementation."²⁸

2.2 Agenda 21: Children and Youth were identified in Agenda 21 as one of nine "major groups" along with women, indigenous people, farmers, business etc. whose involvement in decision-making was deemed to be a "fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development."²⁹ Specific policy recommendations are divided into two sections, the first relating to youth, the second to children. Key clauses state:

" [Governments should take active steps to - / Establish procedures to incorporate children's concerns into all relevant policies and strategies for environment and development at the local, regional and national levels, including those concerning allocation of, and entitlement to, natural resources, housing and recreation needs, and control of pollution and toxicity in both rural and urban areas."

" [Governments, according to their strategies, should take measures to - / Establish procedures allowing for consultation and possible participation of youth of both genders by 1993, in decision-making processes with regard to the environment, involving youth at the local, national and regional levels;"³⁰

As of the date of writing, no government has set up the "procedures allowing for consultation and participation of youth" - additional to those in place prior to 1993. Several consulted youth groups during their preparation of National and Local Agenda 21s. After a long process of international and national consultation, China produced an excellent national Agenda 21 which parrots the original Agenda in the following suggestions relating to young people:

"Governments at all levels should issue documentation to youth circles during the policy-making process concerning environment and

development, and listen to, and when possible incorporate, their opinions. Youth organisations should be encouraged to participate actively in social consultative dialogue in regard to environment and development and to voice their opinions and suggestions about policies and principles."³¹

Other nations have made similar commitments to consult and involve young people and there are a number of examples of good practice at a local level, like the Young people's parish councils in UK, the Conseils Municipaux des Enfants in France, and the Kinderparliaments in Austria & Germany.³²

2.3 The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond,³³ endorsed by the UN General Assembly in November 1996, makes specific commitments to involve young people in decision-making. A complete section is devoted to it:

"WPAY, Section J, Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision making.

Clause 107: The following actions are proposed;

- (a) improving access to information in order to enable young people to make better use of their opportunities to participate in decision-making;
- (b) strengthening opportunities for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities, promoting their social, political, developmental and environmental participation, removing obstacles that affect their full contribution, inter alia freedom of association;
- (c) Encouraging and promoting youth associations through financial, educational and technical support and promotion of their activities;
- (d) Taking into account the contribution of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans affecting their concerns;
- (e) Encouraging increased national, regional and international cooperation and exchange between youth organisations;
- (f) Inviting governments to strengthen the involvement of young people in international forums, inter alia by considering the inclusion of youth representatives in their national delegations to the General Assembly;"

The WPAY2000 makes the point that "Any efforts in any area related to young people are conditional upon enabling the economic, social and political participation of youth as *a matter of critical importance*."³⁴ (italics added)

Other UN Policy documents, such as the Declaration of the Social Summit, the Beijing Women's Conference and Habitat II, have all stressed the importance of young people's participation. Most of these conferences had a Young people's Summit alongside at which the requirement for young people's participation was explicitly stated.³⁵

2.4 The World Summit for Children Declaration and Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, signed September 30th 1990, commits governments to meet various goals related to the health and well-being of children. They include reducing the under five mortality rate (U5MR) by a third, maternal mortality rates by half, malnutrition by half, providing universal access to safe drinking water and basic education, and halving the adult illiteracy rate.

In the "Next Steps"³⁶ section, the signatories declare their commitment to meet the "challenge to take Action. We have agreed to take up that challenge." The next clause states the following:

"Among the partnerships we seek, we turn especially to children themselves. We appeal to them to participate in this effort."³⁶

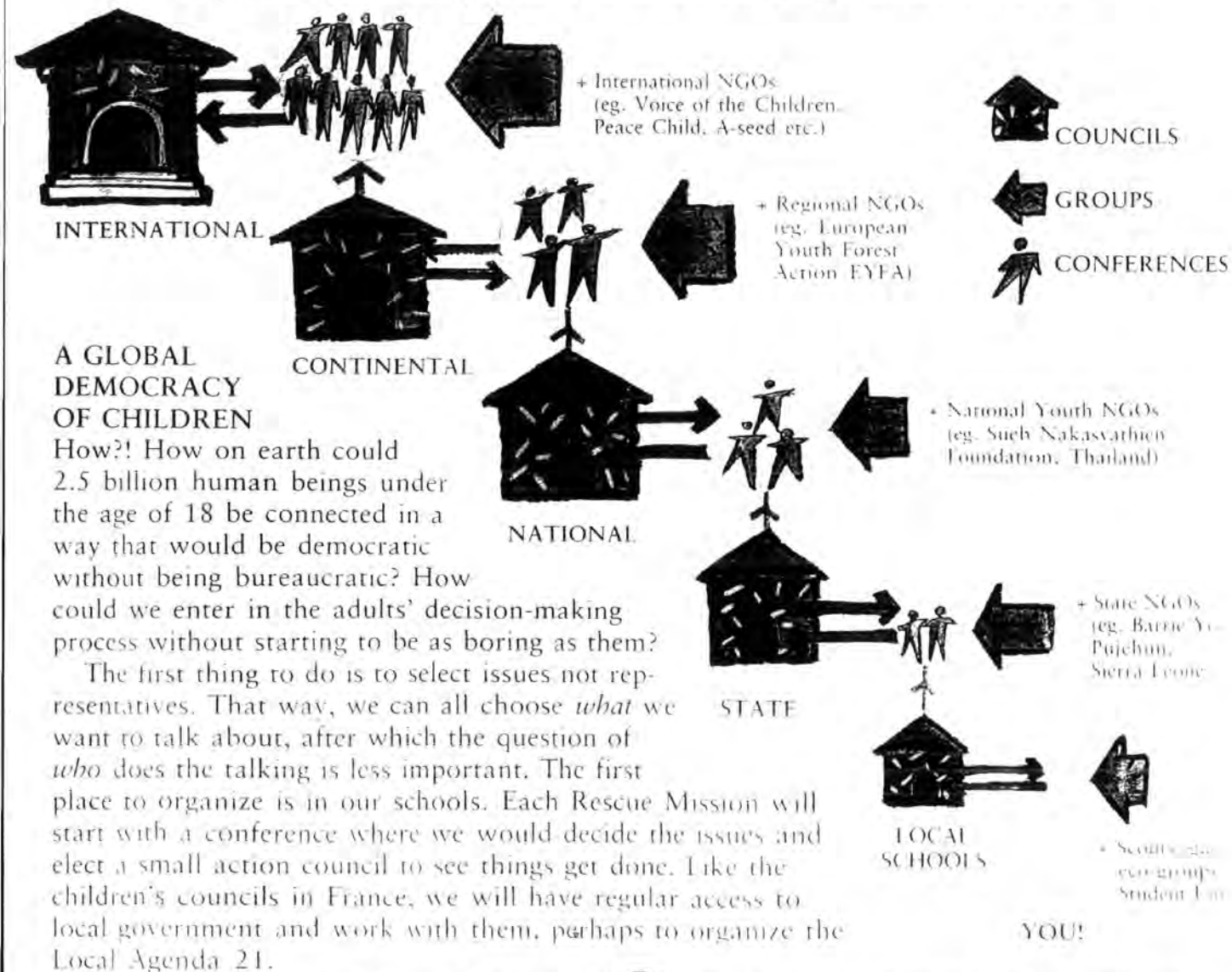
Following the publication of this document, this author conducted a survey by writing promptly to every signatory requesting information about the partnership proposed, and offering assistance. Seven replies were received, none of which contained any specific plans for implementing this clause. UNICEF, the author of this declaration, responded to a detailed letter outlining some of the theories put forward in this thesis, by deploring plans for creating democratic structures through which children's ideas and participation in decision could be achieved as further "marginalising" children: "We want children to participate at the centre of all existing structures of government, not to be placed on one side in new and marginal structures."³⁷ The letter reminded the reader that UNICEF's original mandate was to "provide emergency relief to children" - and that this would not be supported by the kind of participation that this author was proposing.

The words "partnership" and "participation" imply equality of responsibility, shared authority, horizontal rather than vertical control. This is exactly the kind of role that, in this authors' experience, young people want to have in governance. The idea appears at the top of the list of all demands made at young people's meetings on almost any subject. "Listen to us!" - "Hear our Concerns" - "Give us a place at the table!" - "Take us seriously!"³⁸ By endorsing the idea of partnership in all these declarations and summit statements, governments signal their commit-

ment to respond positively to these requests and to give young people a more active, and equal, responsibility to citizenship.

Recent history demonstrates how far short of that commitment governments, the UN, UN agencies and most other governmental institutions have fallen.

2.5 Global Infrastructure proposed by Young people: The idea of setting up a permanent infrastructure for information-sharing, consultation, debate and actual decision-making in partnership with young people seems not to have occurred to any government. The "partnerships, especially with children" which the World Summit of Children Declaration promised has nowhere been practiced or even discussed in any meaningful, on-going way. All efforts to involve children by governments or International agencies have been short-termist, usually for single, one-off events. However, young people themselves are fully capable of conceiving such structures. For example, in preparing of the Children's Edition of Agenda 21, Rescue Mission Planet Earth, young editors mapped out a structure by which each individual child could access to the machinery of governance at every level. The structural design looked like this:³⁹



It is unlikely to happen. The government of Finland has instituted an Annual Day of Access but no other governments have implemented any part of the idea. As one diplomat confided to this author at a dinner following the presentation of the World Summit of Children Declaration, "We put in pieces like Clause 22 as window-dressing to give public appeal to the document. No governments actually expect to make working partnerships with children..."⁴⁰

2.6 SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

A question that recurs for any student of this subject is: do governments fully understand what they are signing up to when they sign these documents. The evidence suggests not. Somewhere, it has been decided that "Young people's participation is a good thing!" - therefore herd instinct demands that all governments sign up to it. The gap between written commitment and actual implementation suggests that governments do not have a clear idea what "young people's participation" actually means. Watching the process of decision-making in UN drafting committees, where large groups of highly paid government servants spend long hours debating the inclusion of single words or phrases in these documents, an impartial observer would be forgiven for thinking that the governments know exactly what they mean and intend to act upon it.

Some politicians⁴¹ feel that a chat with students round a dinner table on a school visit, or a speech at a University Debating society is the extent of effort required to demonstrate a healthy commitment to young people's participation. Some committed Nordic and European nations feel that including a young person on their UN delegations is sufficient to fulfil their commitments. It does, indeed, fulfil that particular clause of the World Programme of Action for Youth, but how can that young person can be thought to represent children if there is no transparent system of selection and no comprehensive briefing mechanism to establish what positions he/she should take on any given issue.

Incompetence, indifference and hypocrisy should not conceal a more serious question which is: does young people's participation make any significant contribution to society? Part of the purpose of this study is to offer case studies which demonstrate that this question may be answered in the affirmative. Hart⁴² states in his book, *Children's*

Participation. "Only through direct participation can children develop a genuine appreciation of democracy and of their own competence and responsibility to participate."⁴² This, indeed, has been the governments' instruction to every UN official who has drafted any of the major international agreements since the International Year of Youth in 1985 when the phrase "young people's participation" was first identified as a major international goal.⁴³

The contrary arguments - for leaving young people out, for treating them as citizens-in-waiting, - are rarely rehearsed. Rutter, Lansdowne, Hart, Coles et al do not even consider them. However, it does help to reflect a moment on why young people, to date, have not been offered a responsible role in governance: young people do not vote, they have limited purchasing power, they are not organised in any formal way and exert little societal pressure. Their business is growing up and getting educated, not shaping society. That they should wait until they have the education to be able to understand how society can be shaped, before they attempt to shape it, makes sense and in some arenas has been proved in practice. For example, after investing close to \$2 million in the young people's participation component of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Maurice Strong, the leader of the Agenda 21 process, was heard to complain that he could not identify a single word in Agenda 21 that had been changed as a result of the input of young people.⁴⁴

A study of the schools of the Victorian Era in Britain⁴⁵ concluded that the "main job of teachers was to show children how to behave properly." The author quotes a study by Mary Sturt who describes meeting young children at that time:

"Almost all the children, when spoken to, winced in expectation of a blow. Some were dulled into semi-imbecility by hunger, disease and ill-usage. Not one knew the alphabet or had any idea of order or discipline or obeying orders and none could attend for more than five minutes."⁴⁶

How could such "people" be expected to take any responsibility within society. However, that was a hundred years ago: children were dragged off the street and dumped into Board Schools. The advent of universal education has brought about a transformation in the confidence and articulacy of young people. It has also created an expectation of responsible behaviour from them very different to that experienced by the

Victorian era researcher. The last hundred years has seen a spectacular change in the nature of childhood, one that has not, to date, been reflected by a changed role of children in governance.

A glance at the stories presented at the UNEP Children's Conference⁴⁷ at Eastbourne, UK and numerous other international gatherings of young people might suggest that young people are more than ready for the "direct participation in democracy" of which Hart speaks. Indeed, there is ample evidence of the contribution that young people have given over recent years to several key social movements:

- **Anti-smoking:** In many parts of the developed world, young people have cajoled and forced their parents to quit smoking. In some cultures, smoking is still considered cool to young people, but the number is diminishing.
- **Young people's leadership in environmental action:** numerous examples exist, and will be illustrated later, of eco-clubs started at schools and by informal young people's groups which have led communities in a progress towards more eco-friendly life-styles through school-to-community links.
- **Youth-led Sustainable Enterprise:** There are several examples of young people initiating profitable enterprises that both provide income and support environmental clean-up. In many developing countries, there are examples of young people starting local garbage collection and re-cycling schemes. Another example of this is an Australian school⁴⁸ for disabled children which has set up an ambitious re-cycling programme to empower their children by giving them a useful hands-on activity. They sort the garbage and earn revenue from recycling companies which collect from them. Their slogan in the community is: "Don't throw it a-way, throw it our way!" In Fiji, the Montfort Boys Town⁴⁹ has set up an integrated farming enterprise which involves the growing of mushrooms, the keeping of animals and a fish farm all using mulch which was formerly dumped by a local brewery into the sea, causing damage to the coral reefs. The project raises about \$60,000 a year for the school.
- **Youth Monitoring:** In fulfilling its commitment to young people's partnership, the UN Commission for Sustainable Development supported the setting up of a youth monitoring system to assess local governments' progress in implementing Agenda 21.⁵⁰ This pack of 16 questionnaires invited young people to ask questions in their communities about every-

thing from consumption attitudes to employment prospects, security issues and atmospheric pollution levels. There are many examples of successful implementation. In Newark on Trent, the council has taken this process a stage further and invited young people to learn about sustainable development through doing "green audits" of its housing stock.⁵¹ The council wins in two ways: its students are getting essential education about environment and development, and it is getting crucial information about its housing stock.

- **Child Campaigners:** Several Child campaigners have become international celebrities. One of the most prominent was Samantha Smith⁵² whose letter to Soviet President, Yuri Andropov, and his reply, were carefully leaked by the Soviet Embassy to all the US press corps. Her trip to the Soviet Union was covered nightly on the US TV news, and her calls for Peace with the USSR whose children were seen playing and laughing with her, made a profound impact on the US public. Likewise, in the Child Labour field, the Free the Children organisation has made a strong mark. With well-publicised trips to Pakistan and India, its founder and leader, 14-year old Craig Kielburger, has helped to raise the profile of child slavery and exploitation both in North America and on the Indian sub-continent. Such people are an inspiration to other children and a reminder to adults that kids can do something. As he memorably remarked, "Hilary Clinton said, 'It takes a village to raise a child'; I would argue that it also takes a child to raise a village because young people have a lot to offer and they bring a new perspective."⁵³

- **Children in Social Service:** many young people are already in service to society by looking after elderly parents. One 16-year old street child in Brasilia decided that, though he was homeless, his plight was not as bad as his grand-father who not only was homeless but was sick as well. He therefore started up a home for grand-parents in a building provided by the city, but run by children. They did the cooking, and the cleaning, and the caring, handing over to skilled medical staff only when essential. The venture was one of the most cost-effective ever under-taken by the city and it continues to this day, involving new young people every year in service to their community.⁵⁴

- **Children in Education:** In the poorest developing societies, there is never enough money, or enough educated adults, to be able to run schools. Thus, in parts of the Philippines, and in Baluchistan, Pakistan,

the state has chosen small numbers of young people to educate up to a basic level on the understanding that they will go back to their villages and educate their friends and contemporaries. Thus you get 13, 14, 15-year old school teachers managing classes of 15-20 young kids, teaching them to read and write like older professionals. Young people are pleased to do this - it gives them a role and a responsibility in society, and they always deliver on their commitments. After a year's work like this, they have earned enough to pass on to secondary education, and the role of local village teacher is passed to another young person.⁵⁵

For governments fully to understand the meaning of young people's participation and make a serious commitment to implement it in ways that maximise its effectiveness, there is a requirement to commit some energy to experimentation. In the next section, we shall explore how the United Nations and its agencies have attempted experiments on the ideas that they have helped draft. All these efforts cost money but not very much. Chiefly they require time and the willingness to understand what young people are - how they operate, their cultural norms and forms of expression. To do this, it is necessary to develop a Methodology of Young people's Participation. This is a subject on which this author has found no previous academic reference. In Section Five of this study, it will be seen that the failure of young people's participation initiatives are generally due to a failure to understand the concept of a methodology, or principles, for young people's participation. An absence of willingness to explore the methodology of young people's participation, or even to explore it as a serious field of research, is the major component absent from current young people's participation efforts. This results in often unintended manipulation, management incompetence, or an insufficiency of resources. All of these short-comings are within the competence of governments and international institutions to correct but they require an effort of will.

REFERENCES

26. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/128, 20/11/89, UN Blue Book VII The United Nations and Human Rights 1945-'95 Article 12, P. 336
27. Ibid. Article 13, Page 336
28. United Nations, Agenda 21 Programme of Action for Sustainable Development, Chapter 25, 14(b), 1992, Page 219.
29. United Nations, Agenda 21 Programme of Action for Sustainable

Development, Chapter 23, 1992, Page 219.

30. Ibid. Page 224-225

31. China Agenda 21, Peoples Press, 1994, Pages 586-590

32. See Chapter 4, Pages 33-50 of the current study;

33. United Nations, World Programme of Action for Youth through the year 2000 and Beyond; General Assembly Resolution, November 30th 1996, Section J, Clause 107, Page 12

34. Ibid, Page 14

35. United Nations, Habitat II Declaration; Cairo Final Statement; Copenhagen Declaration; Beijing Communiqué; Vienna Declaration;

35. 36. World Declaration and Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and

Development of Children, United Nations General Assembly Resolution

37. Letter from Richard Reid, UNICEF to this author, March 12th 1992

38. UNEP GYF Youth Statement to Rio Earth Summit; Vermont Declaration August 1990; Kids Meeting Kids Summit September 1990; Peace Child Priorities 1989, 1990, 1991;

39. Children of the World, Rescue Mission : Planet Earth, Kingfisher 1994, Page 84

40. Conversation with Julius Imaye, Councillor, Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations, September 1990;

41. Conversation with Rt. Hon. John Gummer, United Nations, New York, April 1997;

42. Hart, R. Children's Participation, Earthscan, 1996. Page

43. United Nations. International Year of Youth Declaration, August 1985;

44. Maurice Strong in conversation with Rachel Kyte, Geneva, Sept. 1992;

45. Lane, P. Victorian Age, Batsford, 1972

46. Lane, P. Victorian Age, Batsford, 1972, Page 82;

47. UNEP Leave it to Us Conference Report, June 1997; Page 5;

48. Ibid.; Page 12

49. WorldWatch Magazine, July/August 1997, Page 29:

50. UN DPCSD Youth Intersessional Programme, May '95 to April '96:

51. Newark & Trent Authority Housing Report, October 1994;

52. Samantha Smith, Journey to the Soviet Union, Little Brown 1985

53. Newsweek, August 4th 1997, Page 56

54. Geneva International Children's Conference Report, July 1995:

55. Storgaard, O. Report to World Bank South Asia Dept., April 1997

Chapter Three

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

In the international arena, success stories are rather thin on the ground. The contrast between experience at international and local level is instructive as it shows how those institutions that are closer to children deal with their participation better. These histories of disasters which have befallen various international UN young people's initiatives of the past five years reveal how little governments and the UN understand the methodology of young people's participation or what it can deliver. Success stories, described later in the section on Local Experience, show how effective young people's participation can be skillfully managed.

Let us begin with the United Nations and see how it has implemented the principles of young people's participation in its own programme as it was the author of the statements demanding greater young people's participation.

3.1 UNEP: The UN Environment Programme has been in the vanguard of agencies applauding the value of involving young people and in honouring their contribution to promoting environmental awareness. UNEP honours the effort with an annual international conference known as the Global Youth Forum (GYF). Elizabeth Dowdeswell's opening statement to a recent one in San Francisco in August 1995 sets out UNEP's aims with the Conference:

"For us at UNEP, Agenda 21 is important because it lays out ways in which we're supposed to work with young people. But there are other reasons for having this forum. For one, it's a great chance for young environmental leaders from Mongolia to St Vincent to meet each other and to share ideas...

"Everyday, young people make decisions that affect this planet, its inhabitants and its environment. You, young people, make up half the population of this planet. You will not inherit the planet. You have inherited it already. Together, we must now work to preserve our earth for those who really will inherit it: those uncounted generations yet to come."⁵⁶

Dowdeswell's remarks were given specific focus by her North American Regional Director, Joanne Fox-Przeworski, host of the conference:

"My sister is a teacher and she tells me that when-ever she has a problem with the computers, she asks one of her 9th Grade students to help her out. She'd be crazy not to! They always have the answers.

"This Global Youth Forum is our attempt to get you help us find the answers to the many environmental problems that we face. Over the last ten years, your generation has shown great leadership in the development of eco-protection skills. Now we come to you to ask your help in defining the problems, and finding solutions to them. We'd be crazy not to."⁵⁷

Her remarks lost some of their edge when it was discovered she had left to catch a plane immediately after her speech, missing the chance to hear any of the young people's "problems" or "answers". However, the young participants were not unduly fazed by such behaviour even if they were aware of it. They found the plenary speeches boring and found themselves wondering UNEP had gone to this immense effort to bring them all half way round the world. Yes - they were having fun; yes! it was great to meet all kinds of new people. But what exactly what the purpose of the conference? When challenged on this in an evaluation session, the UNEP Youth Officer, absurdly, was not able to provide an answer! The goal as written in the invitational brochure was:

"What this Global Youth Forum is all about is building skills within the youth community to increase our effectiveness and our impact in our drive to protect our environment and our planet."⁵⁸

In that evaluation session, most young participants reported they had not learned any new skills at the Forum. A moment's reflection might lead one to the common sense conclusion that there are easier ways to teach skills than a week-long conference held in a far-away city. The reality is that the conference was held because a corporate sponsor's funds were there to hold it: every other reason was a construction after the fact.⁵⁹

However, after the Youth Officer had failed to answer their questions satisfactorily and beaten a retreat, the young conference participants themselves brainstormed the question for a while and came up with an interesting proposal for a reason to hold the UNEP Global Youth Forum and its sister International Children's Conference (*- the GYF is for 15-25 year olds; the ICC is for 10-15 year olds*). This was to transform both into young people's policy-making arms for UNEP. Young people would come with Policy Proposals to the Global Youth Forum, discuss them, agree on priority issues and bring those to UNEP's Executive Council to argue for action on them. Two young people's representatives

would be elected by the Youth Forum to comment on all UNEP policy initiatives from a young people's perspective.

That sounded like a genuine attempt at the kind of young people's involvement in decision-making to which Agenda 21 commits governments and organisations like UNEP. But as the eager young delegates presented it to the beleaguered youth officer, his eyes rolled in disbelief: "When are you kids going to wake up and realise that the world doesn't work like that." To his credit, he agreed to discuss the proposal with his superiors but nothing came of it. The idea has since been abandoned causing some disillusion amongst the young people who proposed it.

Many young people who participate in young people's conferences of these kinds come away seized with a passion of excitement and interest generated by the thrill of meeting young people from distant continents who share the same concerns. Certainly, those who participated in the first International Children's Conference held in Eastbourne, UK did. This was, in the minds of organisers and participants alike, a success story. The idea came from a group of young people (10-12 year olds) who formed the Children's Board of a Family Zoo Park in East Sussex. The owners of the zoo, recognising that more than half their visitors were children, saw the value of setting up a Children's Board asking them how the zoo might be improved. They came up with many suggestions, from the way the animals were displayed to the menu in the cafeteria. Wisely, the owners implemented their suggestions and saw the income quadruple in the space of three years to the point where the zoo won an English Tourist Board award for the most successful attraction in the area. To reward the Children's Board, they asked the children what they would like to do to celebrate this success. The children talked for a while and decided they would like to hold an International Children's Conference. The zoo owners searched around, found UNEP and British Airways to sponsor it and hired a professional conference organising company to arrange it. The Children's Board had input to every detail of the conference, with the result that the programmes were all extremely user-friendly to children, and they all had a great time. The preparation period was extremely short and many of the young participants had little idea why they were when they arrived, but the young hosts successfully explained everything when they arrived. Also, there were enough committed young environmentalists with so many impressive achievements to talk about

that the conference buzzed throughout with new ideas and enthusiasm.

At the conference, a follow-up newsletter was promised to keep the young participants in touch with each other; also UNEP promised to produce a conference report listing all the great programmes that had been described at the conference. Neither happened - though eighteen months after the conference, a report was produced eventually. It is quite good but it is too late: the children have moved on to other things. The time for follow-up was immediately after the conference to keep the momentum going. This failure is indicative of the lack of infrastructural support given to UN agencies for the business of young people's participation.

UNEP is a special case as it has genuinely tried to keep the Youth Fora and International Children's Conferences continuing. However, the responsibility for everything - including raising funds - lies in the hands of one young officer who has no one to support him. His record of mistakes tend to lose him the respect of the young people he is appointed to serve: in a memorable case, a Greek Cypriot child was surprised to be sent a copy of a UNEP Children's booklet in Chinese! - it appeared that the officer did not know the difference between Chinese and Greek script in her letter!

Non-governmental organisations are trying to help UNEP develop its system of youth Regional Focal Points. Currently UNEP has not supplied a budget for them so they do not function. Likewise, NGOs tried to help UNEP organise a series of Regional Youth Fora prior to each Global Youth Forum. With UNEP's help, Peace Child International organised two of these in Africa. Delegates went through the arduous process of electing Youth Regional Focal Points for East and West Africa. However, UNEP insisted that all requests for funding be omitted from the final report of the conference, even though the requirement for it was the major concern of all the delegates. As it has no funds itself, UNEP suggested that the young people to go out and raise it themselves.⁶⁰ It won't happen: young people, who have no financial resources, have no motivation to go and look for money for an organisation of which they have no ownership.

Governments, who provide millions of dollars of support for the UN's public information programmes, should be able to find some funding to promote information to that half of the world's population which is under the age of 25. If cajoled enough, we are sure that they would. However, UNEP seems either unwilling, or unable, to do the cajoling. So

maybe NGOs who believe in the importance of regional and international networks of young people participating in decision-making should take over this responsibility for UNEP. However they are unlikely to allow this. The Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), set up by the UN to monitor implementation of the agreements made at the Rio Earth Summit, has taken over much of the work originally done by UNEP. It offers young people many more opportunities for participation and much better access to ministers of the Environment at their annual meeting than UNEP ever could. UNEP is therefore likely to see its leadership of Young people's Participation within the UN system eclipsed in the coming years. This failure can be directly linked to its failure to operationalise the proper methodologies of young people's participation.

3.2 UNICEF: The UN's children's agency has an equally poor record of involving young people in their activities or governance. Brian Mulroney, closed the World Summit for Children with the words: "I address myself particularly to the children here: it is up to them to ensure that we keep the promises we've made here today..."⁶¹ Yet he was the chair of the very committee which, six months before, had taken a decision not to allow any children to present their views at the World Summit for Children.

Many young people's organisations fought that decision fiercely. The World Summit for Children was a perfect opportunity for different forms of young people's participation to be tried out. Strangely, UNICEF, in a totally unrelated project, was sponsoring one of the most successful of these experiments: a children's referendum on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ecuador.⁶² This revealed startling statistics about children's concerns - that they were far more concerned to get protection from physical and sexual abuse by adults and family members than they were to receive the food and education which UNICEF provided. The results of this referendum were presented at a Children's Open Day held two days before the summit on an open-air stage outside the UN: this was UNICEF's expensive gesture towards children's participation in the Summit. Children sang, children danced, children made passionate appeals but nobody listened. The children were literally singing for the birds. When the Heads of State came, two children were selected to meet two leaders. UNICEF officers told the kids to "make it quick" as they were ushered in to see the two politicians - both exhausted after a long day of

meetings. Nervous and flustered, the children gabbled their presentation, pushed the papers over the table and left feeling angry and betrayed.

At the summit itself, children dressed up in national costumes and ushered their leaders to the stage where they signed the Summit documents. Six of them read the Summit Declaration in the six UN languages. This author attended the summit and his diary records these recollections of that closing ceremony:

"The hall is hushed. Children in many splendored national costumes usher their leaders to the dais where they sign the Declaration and Plan of Action. Back in their places, six children step up to microphones and read the preamble in the different UN languages - reading words which they had no hand in writing, watched by 2-dimensional portraits of the kinds of impoverished children which these words are designed to assist and by 3-dimensional politicians who are entirely responsible for providing that assistance. Nothing could symbolise the powerlessness of children more accurately than this - and yet these children cry out the words with a passion! The chinese girl, speaking a language that few can understand speaks with fire in her belly and a blaze in her eyes that all can relate to.

Brilliant!! If only such a person were given the levers of power to implement the fine words, we know she would not rest until it all were done. Instead the levers of power rest in the hands of people in the serried rows around her, many times her age. Their sleepy dark eyes look on, perhaps in shame, at the future she represents - the future which they are already busy screwing up.

"Yet they excuse their lack of enthusiasm for child participation by repeating the old phrase I have heard twice today, once from a UNICEF PR person, Horst Cerni, and once from a Brazilian diplomat: 'When you go to a children's hospital, you do not expect to have brain surgery done by a child!' Of course not! - but I would feel happier about children's hospitals if there was some kind of children's board attached to them, so that children visiting them could feel that children have some ownership of the procedures used in them. UNICEF does not understand the idea of working with children - they are so besotted with their mission to work for them, it does not occur to them that they would be a million times more effective if they harnessed the energy of young people to their mission. The declaration they signed today confirms in Article 22 that they will. The evidence of today's ceremony reveals that they have no idea how to do that, even if they wanted to which, on the basis of the remarks about children's hospitals, they do not. Hypocrites all!"

3.3 UNESCO: UNESCO's efforts at holding a children's conference was perhaps the most dire of all. In the conference held in Paris in May 1995, there was absolutely no participation by children in the set-up, planning or execution of the event. The decision to hold the conference was taken

by UNESCO at the request of the Disney corporation who payed for everything and controlled every detail. UNESCO was merely the facility to which they were delivering the Children's Environmental Statement.

However, UNESCO should have been more vigilant about the manner in which the summit was set up. 800 children had come in classroom groups from 25 countries as a result of winning an environmental competition in the Disney *Mickey Mouse* magazine. Like a roller-coaster in slow motion, the children were moved in regimental discipline from the minute they arrived: to buses, to theme park rides, to Wild West Shows, to meals, to bathroom breaks.

They were supposed to meet, share ideas, and prepare a comprehensive statement on the environment which they would illustrate with their own paintings. The logistics of doing this in three days are considerable, but no serious attempt was made to do any of it. The children, so far as this author could observe, did not meet at all: they travelled in separate busses, worked in separate language groups and sat in separate groups at the plenaries waving their national flags at each other. What was unforgivable was that the "Children's Environment Charter" was drafted by Disney staff and approved for printing by UNESCO weeks before the children arrived. At the presentation to the UNESCO Director, it was read not by children but by Disney actors. Yet in the press release put out by UNESCO, it stated that "these Children have come from all over Europe to draft their concerns about the environment into a single statement."⁶³ Even the children's paintings were repainted by professionals. During the 52 minute presentation to UNESCO, children spoke for a total of 4 minutes; in the closing ceremony, no child spoke at all.

When this author wrote to the Director General objecting that UNESCO had made incorrect statements in its press release about the children's authorship of the Environmental Charter, no reply or apology was received from UNESCO. It was as though the principles of children's participation were too trivial to warrant serious thought. As one staff person asserted at an NGO Board Meeting: "Yes, a mistake was made, but it was only a kid's conference for God's sake!"⁶⁴

Such an attitude is common amongst diplomats and political officials confronted with requests for serious participation by young people. Adults who try to promote effective participation are looked down on like tedious school teachers with esoteric principles which are of absolutely

no importance at all in the grand scheme of things.

3.4 UN Youth Unit: The UN Youth Unit was set up as a "report-writing body" - coordinating and advising member states on youth policy. It produces an irregular newsletter outlining activities of young people around the world. *[The Spring 1995 edition arrived in December 1996 informing about dozens of events that had already happened!]* It is difficult to meet a young person who has heard of the Unit, or who has read its publications. This is not surprising: until last year, it was headed by Amr Ghaleb who once proudly informed this author: "I don't like young people! I don't need to meet young people! I only work for the ministers who make youth policy!"

Needless to say, he was not an advocate of any kind of young people's participation. His successor, William D.(Bill)Angel, does advocate participation in principle. But he has been slow to implement it in practice. He successfully secured funding for a World Youth Forum in Vienna in November 1996. Responding to advocates of young people's participation in the work of the Youth Unit, he organised six preparatory meetings (Prepcoms) to plan the Forum. Each involved representatives of top world youth organisations. Sadly, their deliberations and long expensive journeys to distant cities for the prepcoms did not deliver the control they were promised. The schedule agonised over and decided by the prepcoms was thrown out by the Youth Unit staff in order to gain support from the rest of the UN system and other powerful NGOs. To achieve this support, the Unit invited every UN agency and interested influential NGOs to make a speech on the opening day. The result was that the 600 students who had flown in from around the world were forced to sit in silence for eight hours, listening to 53 remarkably similar speeches, each of which "thanked the Austrian Hosts for their generous arrangements..." and "affirmed their support for the participation of young people..." It was a crippling and dis-empowering way to start a major conference: the young people who had been at the prepcoms felt cruelly betrayed as most delegates blamed them for allowing such a ridiculous adult-dominated schedule to be adopted. As information about the betrayal of the prepcom process seeped out, confidence in the Youth Unit fell to zero.

Getting through the rest of the week was a nightmare for the organisers, fending off objections and scandals raised by radical student

elements. Confidence was never entirely restored. The final straw came at the end of the conference when, finally, a plenary debate of some vigour and interest got started amongst the young delegates. It concerned a final statement which had been no part of the organisers' plan, but which the young people had decided was crucial to justify their attendance at the conference to their members back home. This author recorded some impressions of that final debate:

Friday 27th November:

"A great debate got going in the final plenary about the final statement. Young people from different working groups had spent time overnight drafting it, and it wasn't great, but it was theirs in a way that nothing else had been this week! For what happened at the final Plenary, I could kill Bill Angel: always with his eye on the next budget, he had organised visiting Ministers of Youth from key nations like Andorra, Iran and Portugal to speak and show their support for Young people's Conferences of this kind. So he cut short the debate to allow them to speak! The young people were outraged! This was proof, if proof were needed, that nothing had changed in the attitude of the Youth Unit towards young people. Its role remains only to serve Ministries of Youth not young people themselves.

"As the chair tried to introduce the Minister of Youth from Andorra, the level of anger in the room became intense: one young person started screaming loudly from the back of the hall, refusing to be silenced. Bill Angel interceded, over-ruling the youth chair and ensuring that the young person was ejected. Many others left in sympathy and most of the rest voted with their feet as one bland pronouncements about the 'importance of young people' followed another from the stage. It was a cruel reminder of the powerlessness of young people to run even those conferences which are set up supposedly by young people to give young people a platform for their views.

"However, though it was an ugly moment, from the perspective of the Youth Unit, the support of government ministries gave credence and therefore funding to their conference and their Unit. The survival of the unit and its staff jobs are never things to be sacrificed on the altar of principles about young people's participation."

3.5 CONCLUSION

A common thread in all these histories could be seen to be manipulation. Young people are being offered something that serves the purpose of the person offering more richly than those to whom it is offered. It is important to remember that the most successful young people's movements are those which, like the Hitler Youth, made no pretence of young people's participation but were unashamedly in the business of

recruiting young people to their politics. That is not the case here: each of the UN agencies genuinely seek effective young people's participation but a combination of the cultural pressures of the way the organisation is run and financed, plus a total ignorance about methodologies of young people's participation have ensured that their efforts end in failure.

Part of the youth rebellion and subsequent recognition of youth movements in the 1960s was to recognise young people for what they are. They are not what adults, particularly authoritarian adults, would like them to be. They are "rebellious, untidy, careless, unwashed, affectionate, casual, and mostly un-serious."⁶⁵ Any institution that seriously wishes to involve young people must work within their culture, not impose their ways upon them. It is not in the nature of governments or any international institutions of governance to change their culture - their mode of dress, their way of addressing each other, their traditions, privileges, or salaries - for any group. Therefore, strong though the UN has been in its written support for the idea of a powerful role for young people in its governance, experience suggests that it will remain unable to translate its principles into active reality.

Also, the problem of setting up international democratic structures for the participation of young people in international events is exacerbated by the fact that there are no sound structures at the level of local or national governance. However, there are the beginnings of structure and, when well-executed, they are, as we shall see in the next chapter, most effective.

REFERENCES

56. UNEP, Global Youth Forum Report, UNEP, 1995; Page 4;
57. Paraphrased from Notes taken by the author. Not quoted in Report;
58. UNEP Brochure for Global Youth Forum 1995, UNEP, Nairobi, 1995
59. Conversation with Brock Dickinson, UNEP GYF organiser, August '95, San Francisco;
60. Correspondence between Peace Child and UNEP, January - June '96;
61. UNICEF, Major Speeches to the World Summit for Children, 1991, P.98
62. UNICEF, Children's Referenda, Quito, Ecuador, 1990;
63. UNESCO International Children's Conference, Press Release No. 0114 23/5/95;
64. Report of Rescue Mission Board Meeting IV, April 1996, Page 5, Intervention by Susana Sam Vargas;
65. Coles, Bob, Youth and Social Policy, UCL Press, 1995, Page 174

Chapter Four

EXPERIENCES WITH CHILDREN IN GOVERNANCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The greatest amount of research and practical experimentation on children in governance has occurred in the area of local government. There is a considerable literature to draw upon, and several national experiences to review. This area has also been helped by changes in the law relating to children (ie. people under the age of 18). In the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 12 was included specifically to enable children a say in divorce cases about which parent they would like to live with. This has been extended in law to the extent that there have been cases in the USA where children have been enabled to "divorce" parents whom the courts are persuaded are prejudicial to their future. There are also now numerous mechanisms accepted by the courts whereby children can give evidence via video statements recorded in the home so that they do not have to face the threatening culture of the courtroom.

This progress contrasts heavily with recent cases in the British courts where one child was forced to return to his natural parents in South Africa against the powerfully expressed wish of the child concerned.⁶⁶ In another case, a newspaper discovered a girl from Sheffield who had a Pakistani father, in Pakistan having been forced at age 14 to marry an older man from the father's village of origin.⁶⁷

In neither case were the provisions of the Child Rights Convention mentioned in any press reports. This highlights an interesting point explored by Lansdowne: "Has the law progressed more quickly than public opinion and professional practice, or is the legal provision still inadequate?"⁶⁸ In the British case, she concludes that the answers to both questions is yes. She cites the example of public opinion moving ahead of the law in relation to smoking: people accept "No Smoking" on planes and in public places as generally they agree that smoking, and secondary smoking, are bad for you. There is no such consensus on children's rights in governance: children, in much of the public mind, are there to be seen and not heard and when they are heard, it is usually to cause trouble. Even in local governance, therefore, there is an immense amount of work to be done to change the public perception of young people before the successes described here' gain widespread public support.

4.1 Austria and Germany

Austria has made a commitment to explore improvement of child participation in decision-making as one of its priorities during its presidency of the European Union in 1999. Its current practice promotes "self-determination for the child" in relation to its rights under the law, and in numerous lesser areas like a child's responsibility in "pocket money transactions"⁽⁶⁹⁾ - where commitments made by the child can be legally enforced.

"Irrespective of their citizenship, children have the statutory right to vote in the election of their class speaker from 5th Grade onward and their school speaker from 9th grade onward. The school speakers, equal in number and rights to parents and teachers, have an important say in all school matters, above all as regards school autonomy. In addition, there is a statutory youth body representing the interests of pupils at the Lander and Federal levels, whose members are elected by all Austrian School speakers."⁽⁶⁹⁾

In this way, Austria declares its commitment to young people's involvement in decision-making. It is almost identical to the system operating in Germany and, in the opinion of Henry Eckhardt, a 19-year old student recently joining the new Germany from the former GDR, it does not work. In a written report for an NGO Newsletter, he observes:

"The class speakers are almost always the most nerdy, most unpopular pupils in the class - elected as their role is seen to be a punishment rather than a privilege. The Meetings are of the most stifling boredom with long discussions of things that have no interest to students, like the nature of teachers expense claims, teacher re-training in the holidays, school inspection and relationship to national and regional authorities. On the rare occasions where something of interest to students does come up, the teachers and parents listen sympathetically to what the students have to say, then go on to do exactly what they want. It's like there is a conspiracy between the parents and teachers against the students and, of course, they are always the majority. So the students have no real power. And they know it - so they feel defeated before they even get into the room.

"It is no surprise to me that smart kids do not want to get involved. It is no fun. Why not spend the time doing sports, going to parties, shopping or at the movies? I myself think that and yet, when I became a part of the new German system, I was more idealistically motivated than any of my peers. I genuinely wanted to make it work. I tried extremely hard for many months, but I couldn't. We need to go back to the drawing board and start thinking it through all over again."⁽⁷⁰⁾

That process of thinking it through has not begun. In most of the rest of the world, the Austro-German system for involving young people in governance is deemed to be technically the most efficient and progressive in the world. Jones and Wallace cite it as the "most advanced and well-developed in Europe."⁷¹ Several schools in the UK, Switzerland and other places follow it and make it work - up to a point. However, the principle of where power is located is always a problem, as we shall see below.

4.2 France

In Schiltigheim, a town near Strasbourg, in the International Year of Youth (1985), the enterprising mayor decided to set up a Conseil Municipal des Enfants (CMEs). The Conseil met several times during the year and, through the freshness and directness of its observations on key local issues, won the hearts of the local media and elected officials. It also won great public support as the young people spoke out for issues about which the public felt strongly - like transport policy, vandalism and reduction in public services. For all these reasons, the Mayor, Alfred Mueller, won great public praise for his initiative. He produced brochures outlining what he had done, and invited other cities to set up their own CMEs. Several did - and similar tales of success and public support came in from around France. The system of election was different from the German: the children in local neighbourhoods elected their neighbourhood representatives so there was citywide ward representation. In many ways this is a preferable system and the governance that evolves from it relates to where children live rather than where they go to school.

So popular was the initiative that there started to be national and international news reports on it. Local politicians saw the mileage that the Mayor of Schiltigheim had won from his idea and wanted to share in his success. As the political elections loomed in 1988, politicians were asked by voters whether they planned to set up CMEs in their constituencies. Saying "Yes!" to this was deemed to be a vote-catcher, so most did. Then, when elected, they had to make good on their election promises. The result was that suddenly there were close to 1,000 CMEs in France. In the decade since then, in spite of setting up a national association of CMEs (ANACEJ), there has been a falling off of interest - due to many of the same reasons that afflicted the Austro-German model.

"The good children don't stay around long enough," complained a councillor in Toulouse, "we are constantly having to re-train, re-activate and remind children of their duty to their community. The positive results seem to diminish every year."⁷²

How can one prevent child participation in local governance becoming a fad that lasts only as long as the enthusiastic, talented children remain or teachers and parents are on hand to support them? How can one overcome the difficulty that children, alone amongst political constituencies, by definition are age-constrained? The answer is that, though childhood does not last for ever, institutions to support and care for children do. Thus a combination of outreach through schools, youth clubs, families and neighbourhood associations should, if energetically pursued, provide the continuity desired. The problem lies usually in maintaining the energy and commitment of the local authorities. In Germany, if our student's experience is typical, the statutory requirement does not seem to be sufficient. Probably what is required is a combination of statutory requirement and local energy-generation by children, teachers and their parents. In France, the place of statutory requirement was taken by electoral promise. In both France and Germany, the commitments caused the take-up of child participation in governance to be more widespread than elsewhere. However, the problem of diminishing returns will probably require that those commitments be re-thought in France as well.

4.3 United States of America

In certain states of the USA, young people's participation has become extremely sophisticated. In these states, young people can look forward to being invited to participate in the decision-making processes of local authorities, businesses and school districts. However, an early manifestation of this sophistication, Community Youth Action Councils, are no longer in operation. A Federal Programme, they were set up in the mid-1980s as a response to young people's issues such as violence and drug abuse. The idea was to create teams of young people who would identify particular problems relating to young people in their district. Set up across the country, many achieved spectacular success in promoting peer-to-peer counselling in such subjects as substance abuse, truancy, job-searching, juvenile crime and parental or family abuse. When this programme came to an end in 1989, several local and state authorities

decided to continue it.

Its success was based on the enthusiastic commitment to it by certain teachers and social workers who experienced the contribution that empowered young people could make. In cities such as Seattle and Mobile, Alabama, local businesses saw the power that young people had and set up Youth Boards for their companies. Though at heart an initiative to gain young people's support for their activities, these young people's councils did in fact shape corporate attitudes, particularly toward the assessment of the environmental impact of their activities.

Young people's participation is currently re-establishing itself in communities across the USA. In the city of San Francisco, citizens recently voted in a Youth Commission composed of young people nominated and selected by their peers in each jurisdiction of the city. The commission has a specific responsibility to assess the impact on young people of all local policy.⁷³

Hart's team at the City University of New York's Children's Environment Research Group has conducted some model experiments in children's participation, particularly in the setting up of public parks. He describes the setting up of a multi-purpose park in East Harlem thus:

"Separate workshops were held with groups of children, teenagers and parents. Three -dimensional modelling materials were used because we have found this method to be more liberating for people not accustomed to design. It also enabled very young children to be involved. They created features such as cardboard sandboxes and gardens, benches made of plasticine. As they struggled to locate these features on a scale model, they argued out their priorities and debated the most critical design issues. This enabled questions of access, safety and security to be aired.

"The different model designs were wheeled out on to the sidewalk for a design festival. Large numbers of residents were attracted by the music and the food and were invited to critique and modify the designs. The landscape designers then produced alternative syntheses of the different groups ideas. These were then critiqued again by the community and the children before being hardened into a final design."⁷⁴

This process demonstrates arguably an excellent understanding of the technology of young people's participation:

- children have ownership of the project in partnership with adults.
- their culture and forms of expression are honoured - through the use of modelling materials.

- they were given support by professional landscape designers who also gave them the respect to listen to their views.
- through the sidewalk design festival, there was outreach to the whole community, rather than just a coterie of child spokespeople;
- considerable amounts of money were spent to engage people's attention through the provision of food and music.

The pay-off, according to Hart, is that "spaces created by this kind of highly participatory community design process suffer much less vandalism than those carried out by designers behind closed doors."⁷⁵ That kind of responsibility for community facilities is engendered by similarly participatory approaches in planning activities from schools, to communities, to whole cities, throughout the world. Such participation has become the hallmark of Local Agenda 21 activity which is generally deemed to be the most positive success story that has emerged from the five years of activity since the Rio Earth Summit.

The USA made a bid for leadership of the field of children's participation in governance by organising in July 1996 in Racine, Wisconsin, a meeting that was held called: "Promoting young people in Governance." The report of the conference I read contained no discussion of the methodology of young people's participation but it did include some revealing comments recorded by young people in the course of the meeting:⁷⁷

"Strong young people's governance gives adults more integrity. It's about doing the right thing. One of the great benefits of increased participation is that young people see they need adult educators, mentors and allies. They will see adults not as controllers but as friends, partners in a developmental process." Kevin Tarpley

"The justification for expanding youth governance is both moral and practical. From the principles of diversity to democracy, to the benefits of better informed reliable young people, more creative decision-making, and the production of a new generation of skilled community and business leaders - all derive from effective, well-planned young people's participation." Tim Burke

"I am now 28 and an engineer with NASA. I attribute almost everything I have achieved to my 10-year involvement with the running of the YWCA. It gave me real confidence. It taught me leadership skills and provided me with avenues to use them in real situations." Tina Herrera

"It's a 2-way street. In my year with the California Association of Student Councils, my skills and my knowledge have grown exponentially - I've been like a human sponge. And the council with students in charge keeps the school boards on the ball. Technology is moving at such a rate if you don't have kids on board, you're going to be left behind. The kids who are going to inherit the earth were playing computers at age 5 and setting up websites at age 12."

Steve Arnowitz

"Boards must nurture young people's talent, not kill it. Young people are willing to take greater risks so it can be scary to give them power. But why worry about taking risks when already we're failing?! Why be so nervous as when we don't take risks, nothing happens!"

Paul Schmitz

"The important component is the training. Young people coming on to a Board of Trustees must be taught not just the nuts and bolts of what they have to do but to know why they are doing it. Many Board are boring and dysfunctional if they have no clear direction. Young people can help provide that direction in ways that are clear and direct if they are given a sound training in how to do so."

Anne Hoover

According to two reports of the meeting, the major result was supposed to be the setting up of an NGO to promote young people's participation in both corporate and institutional governance. However, this author has not been able to get a reply from the phone number, or even secure an address for the organisation: maybe the problems of maintaining interest in this narrow field of young people's participation in governance is proving hard to sustain even in the USA.

4.4 Developing Countries

In developing countries, children participate in the work of society from an early age. They all help with the house-work or farm duties, gathering wood or collecting water from the well. ACTIONAID⁷⁸ conducted studies in Nepal, Uganda, the Gambia, Kenya and other developing countries, to assess the nature of young people's participation in these developing societies at the local level. The first conclusion they reached was that young people were excellent allies in Participatory Rural Appraisal.⁷⁹ They were thorough in their collection of data: sensitive in their interview techniques and their manner of approaching fellow members of the community, both old and young: adept at winking out information about crime and drug abuse amongst young people that adults would not have

been able to secure; and, most surprising of all, they had a clear and unblinkered way of analysing the data collected, putting new and fascinating twists upon it which escaped the older, professional researchers.

The goal of the ACTIONAID research was to help development agencies to improve the lives of children by looking at the roles and activities of boys and girls in rural communities through their own eyes. The report starts by recognising that children have been "conspicuous by their absence as active participants from the bulk of development planning, implementation and evaluation except in the roles of school-goers, health or disaster victims."⁸⁰ This is in direct contravention of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 14 and 32 and also utterly contrary to the spirit of Agenda 21 Chapter 25.

It goes on to explain how western concepts of childhood have permeated much development work, flying in the face of the reality of what happens on the ground. For example, in the UK, it is illegal to leave an infant in the care of a child under 14; in Peru, recent research⁸¹ revealed that many 6-14 year olds are heads of households and the major wage earner in a family. In Bangladesh, children aged 5-14 form 18 per cent of the rural farm labour force.⁸² A pre-occupation with children working in mines and factories, with urban street children and child prostitutes has tended to obscure the vast rural child labour force which is endemic throughout most of the developing world. And more and more children are becoming economically active: in Ecuador, the 1990 census quoted 12-year olds as economically active; the 1992 census quoted 8-year olds, and even that may not reflect the real situation where children often become dependable farm labourers as early as four.⁸³ Such young people rarely get a chance to be educated which leads ACTIONAID's researchers to recommend increasing the educational options available for young people - staggered working days so that kids can go to school in afternoons or evenings when they are not required on the farm.

However, ringing through every page of this fascinating research document is the compelling evidence that development agencies need to listen to the voices of young people: they will tell development agencies what their problems are, and be bubbling over with ideas about how to solve them.

"Children are a unique reminder of the past and signals of the future. In all societies, children represent the possibility of continu-

ing all that is best in a society and achieving all that is yearned for. This is as it should be. However, all too often, children are treated as human beings on probation. Innovative participation on their part is discouraged in favour of socialisation into facsimiles of the adults around them. They thus become bearers of all the mistakes of both past and present."⁸⁴

These mistakes are most glaringly obvious in the environmental area. Where rapid deforestation has occurred, children have to walk further and further to collect firewood. Children are well aware of the effect that this has on their lives:

"If I am only involved in fodder and fuelwood collection, then I will not pass my exams. If I will not pass, I will not be a teacher."

*Birdhan Thing, 12, Bainse, Sindhuli District, Nepal*⁸⁵

"If we want a slogan about child labour, we should instigate environmental protection in rural areas. Where there is flood, deforestation and landslide, there is food deficiency, illiteracy and child labour. So we can't remove the vicious cycle of poverty without environmental protection; without it, rural people will always remain poor."

*Pashupati Sapkota, Nepalese Field Researcher, Actionaid*⁸⁵

Children have already shown themselves to be willing advocates of environmental protection and improvement. In Sierra Leone, there are more than 1,000 members of a student led environmental protection network that manages a children's forest, conducts awareness raising programmes - seeding embankments to prevent erosion, celebrating world environment day, and doing sustainability monitoring in different regions of the country. Similar programmes are in progress in several developing countries where young people's leadership is inspiring other young people to care for the environment in which they find themselves. This takes curious and inspiring forms - like the young people's "Happiness Group" which gathers young people in a remote Amazonian village and looks at what can be done to improve their community and make life worth living there for young people. This is part of an effort to staunch the exodus of young people to towns and big cities. The movement was set up and led by a 16-year old girl.⁸⁶

There are many other examples of young people's leadership: a Mexican boy walked 1300 miles to Mexico City to lobby the government to stop cutting the Rain Forest in his district. He obtained assurances from the government so went home. A year later, the logging was contin-

uing, so he, and some friends, marched back to Mexico City and this time created a huge media stir about the issue. Several international NGOs rallied to his cause, and the logging was stopped. He came back to his region a controversial figure and had a lot of explaining to do to local workers who had lost their jobs with the logging companies.⁸⁷

Another celebrated young people's leader was 12-year old Iqbal Masih. He was sold at the age of four to work in a carpet factory in Pakistan as a slave. Increasingly enraged by the conditions in which he and his co-workers were forced to live, he escaped and tried to unionise the child-labour force. He got the UNICEF local representatives to campaign for their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He won several concessions from his employers and his work earned him the International Reebok Human Rights Award. Shortly after receiving this, he was found dead in mysterious circumstances. Rumours circulated that he had been murdered by employers angry at what he had done to raise the expectations of child workers.⁸⁸

In Uganda, researchers have reported⁸⁹ a widespread willingness to include young people in the under-tree meetings where village business is discussed. The children sit in on the meetings and are called upon to give their opinions by the village elders. Frequently, they will be required to carry out some of the decisions taken by the village, so the principle of giving them some ownership of the making of those decisions seems natural.

In several indigenous societies, there are already methodologies in place to include the views of younger members of society. Several of the Native American Nations have sophisticated "citizenship training" programmes that prepare young people in stages to take greater and greater responsibility for their community and tribe. The process of growing up is seen as a process of passing responsibility down to generations yet unborn, while vestiges of responsibility for human behaviour remain in the hands of generations who have passed on. In this way, a whole community is made responsible.

Clearly this is an area where far greater research is warranted and needed. It may be that societies in the developing world will give us richer and more detailed clues about which methodologies for young people's participation work well than we can find in the developed world.

United Kingdom:

In the UK, the principle of child participation has been championed by many organisations. In the 1980s, the Manpower Services Commission once caused an outcry by failing to create places for young people on the new committees to oversee the Youth Training Scheme. "New Bodies deny trainees a voice!!"⁹⁰ was the front page banner headline in Scene - the Youth Service Magazine! Since the Elton Report of 1982, young people's participation is an accepted part of the social service scene with innumerable participation kits and case studies to choose from.

The Local Government Information Unit recently published a guide promoting children and young people's democratic participation in Local Government.⁹¹ The Guide lists 60 examples of children's involvement in everything from fully-structured permanent young people's councils to youth consultations on specific issues. However, as its authors concede, children's participation in the UK is still in the evangelical stage:

"A commitment to involve young people in democratic processes recognises the value of the contribution they can make, but for the health of our society, it is also urgent and necessary that they are involved. Too many young people believe that politicians will never listen to them. Convincing children that democracy works for them could not be a higher priority..."⁹²

The examples are given with a view to showing that something - anything! - to involve young people is a good thing and that almost everything works in some way to the good of young people. What it does not do is to analyse and evaluate the different models mentioned or establish any principles for the methodology of young people's participation - beyond the broad principles laid down in the UN Convention. That work remains to be done and, with a grant from the Rowntree Foundation, plans are in hand to review six model experiments in young people's participation from the point of view of the young people, the teachers, local government officers and parents. Such research is urgently needed across Europe to ensure a more secure administrative approach to such schemes.

The UK National Committee for UNICEF is another organisation that gives leadership to the principle of young people's participation. In its UK Agenda for Children - a national report on the implementation of

the Convention on the Rights of the Child - it quoted a number of children's opinions in their own words. The annual UNICEF State of the World's Children report gave an entire panel to the publication, congratulating its "major innovatory contribution"⁹³ to the methodology of monitoring child rights in an individual country. It commends, with apparent surprise, the "innovation" of the input of children's voices which give "immediacy and relevance" to the report. The children's comments in fact seem rather bland:

"Kids can't play where I live; needles everywhere, stolen cars, no one cares." / "Parents shouldn't have the right to hit children. It just makes children grow up to be violent!"⁹⁴

But, UNICEF enthuses:

"Such contributions help to bring to life an exhaustive study of children's rights in which no issue is too small for attention - school uniforms, the opening of mail in children's homes - or too large - children and violent conflict in Northern Ireland, housing codes, and transport policy."⁹⁴

Such praise lends legitimacy to the involvement of children. However tokenistic it might appear, (the report was compiled and edited entirely by adults with no participation from children) - UNICEF and its constituency are waking up to the power and eloquence that young people have in talking about the issues that concern them. In other words, they are recognising how good the provisions of their Convention actually look when they are put into practice!

At the local level, several county authorities have experimented with young people's participation. Amongst the most successful has been the Youth Parish Councils (YPCs). Usually centred on a Parish Church, the Parish council takes care of community facilities in a village or a neighbourhood. Young people are given the responsibility for young people's activities in their parish and have a small budget to work with. The goals of the Youth Parish Council are defined in a handbook produced by the County of Hampshire called "The totally excellent Youth Council handbook!"⁹⁵

1. to investigate the needs of teenagers in the village and report on their provision to the Parish Council;
2. to administer a budget specifically for the needs of young people and be responsible for producing accurate accounts;

3. express teenage ideas on the running of the community, to discuss and report back to the Parish Council;
4. to give teenage views on landscaping and amenity improvement and to report back to the Parish Council
5. to contribute the Annual Parish Assembly."⁹⁵

Reports from the county speak in glowing terms of the success of the initiative: "The youngsters display increased self-confidence the more responsibility we give to them!" reported a councillor from Alton."⁹⁶

Another council reported that the children had completed a children's playground, a mountain bike trail, a litter awareness week and a regular page in the monthly parish magazine⁹⁷ - all within the first year.

Continuity is a problem, but a partnership with schools and individual teachers within the community seems to address this problem.

The "political education" inherent in young people's participation seems to be the driving force in much of its implementation in the UK. Disillusion with the political system runs high amongst young people in the UK. In 1996, for the first time in many years, the Young Conservatives failed to have an annual meeting because there were not enough members interested to come. Though New Labour has attracted large numbers of people under-25s to join the party, less than 50 per cent of the 18-25 age group bothered to vote in the 1997 election. Thus, it is argued by think tanks like the Institute for Public Policy Research and others, that children should be given more power to control the community in which they live. Isabel Willsham wrote:

"Our message to children can be very negative. We ignore them, patronise them, suspect them of being up to no good and tell them off. After being on the receiving end of such a barrage, it is nothing short of miraculous that any children at all grow up into well-adjusted adults. If we were to extend the realities of citizenship to our fellow citizens who happen to be children, we would certainly make their transition to adulthood a lot easier."⁹⁸

Several in the Youth Service field have explored the business of young people's participation very seriously. One such was the Community Education Council (CEC) of South Derbyshire. In their report of June 1991,⁹⁹ they explain how they initially set up a Youth Sub-committee which met "the County Council's criteria regarding the substantial involvement of young people... " It proved to be problematic because:

"1. The Young People felt out of place. Despite very positive training

had been undertaken, the traditional committee approach was still off -putting. The young people who came were all well-motivated and academically able - which in itself was a problem as they were not truly representative of their peers. Even they felt uncomfortable when faced with the formal committee structure with its long agendas and adult environment. Their initial enthusiasm evaporated quickly.

2. Because of academic and other commitments, on-going commitment to the committee was hard to sustain.

3. Because the committee representatives were all young people, the part -time adult working staff felt no ownership of the committee process and may have been alienated by it. Facing up to the failure of the committee, youth workers and young people themselves met and discussed how to do it better, and consulted with other NGOs, like the uniformed young people's movements - scouts, guides etc. The result was a group which the young people themselves called *The Power Pack*.¹⁰⁰

The Power Pack is a young people's sub-committee which is composed entirely of young people - no adults at all. Each statutory youth club in South Derbyshire has the right to send four representatives to attend (preferably two male, two female) - and each club has one vote. Any four can come to any meeting so there is no need for an on-going commitment by individual kids. Notes from each meeting are posted on the youth club notice-board so all know what is happening at the Pack all the time.

Each club also nominates one of its part-time youth workers to take responsibility for participation in the Power Pack, organising transport to meetings etc. Uniformed young people's groups are also allowed to send representatives as are adult youth workers, but no adults are allowed to speak at meetings unless specifically called upon by the young people to do so. They created a Constitution which outlined their duties, responsibilities and purposes, with membership criteria and the exact manner by which the meetings are to be run - circulating chairmanship by a young people's representative etc. A resource pack was created with structure diagrams, a voting card, an introduction to the Power Pack, and an explanation of budgets available which amount to £60,000 sterling per year. The young people also produced a Development Plan which outlined their targets for the first twelve months:

- "- reduced level of professional input; greater responsibility for all activities taken on by young people themselves;

- more and better small projects by the youth clubs:
- good links established between the Power Pack and other South Derbyshire Council Committees & Executives;
- regular updates provided to all clubs by the Power Pack;
- clear evidence that young people are involved in decision -making;
- clear evidence that part -time youth workers feel supported and not threatened by the Power Pack.
- Evidence that PowerPack meetings can be fun and not torture!"¹⁰¹

This last was assured by holding the meetings in places like discos and bowling alleys with parties afterwards. The result of this tactic is that all the Meetings in the first year were quorate with 73 young people attending the first five meetings (53 per cent female, 47 per cent male). The average agenda for a meeting would include the following items:

- "- Decisions on bids for grant aid and project funding
- suggestions for future inter -club & district events
- consultation on issues affecting the youth service
- update on new initiatives being taken by the Youth Team
- Feedback on past events
- Information on Forthcoming Events
- sharing of information between youth clubs on programming
- Any other business"¹⁰²

The County of Devon have gone seriously into the business of creating a county-wide Youth Council. Its purpose is "to provide the Devon County Council with the views of young people both in relation to County Council initiatives and on matters they raise themselves. The Council will support and encourage young people's awareness and influence over issues that affect their lives." The Council is run by young people for young people with secretarial and clerk support from the County Council.¹⁰³ It consists of 20 members, four from pre-16-year old students; five post-16-year old students; seven from affiliated young people's organisations (scouts, guides, youth groups etc.) and four "affiliated individuals." Elections are conducted by mail from a pool of candidates nominated by schools and youth groups, or individual young people who have affiliated because of a personal interest. Elections take place in September of each year, with young people's councillors being elected for two-year terms. 50 per cent of councillors stand for election each year. It meets three times a year, and conducts a series of local area meetings to research what issues are of concern to young people in different parts of the county.

In its first years, it has focussed on areas of concern raised by

young people and attempted to take action upon them. It has produced discussion/guidance documents on bullying and crime prevention. It has also produced a useful booklet about how to make an effective Student Council at schools. Their booklet advises "Year Councils" for each school year consisting of a male and female representative from each class. These should meet every two weeks: each Year Council should elect a male and a female representative to serve on the Student Council which should meet twice a term. The booklet has extensive plans and structure diagrams showing how the Student Council should have a staff facilitator, a Liaison Person from amongst the Board of Governors and from the PTA. In a remarkably well-thought out series of action steps, it covers all the bases for what would seem to create a highly effective network of student councils across the county. However, there is no published account of research into how well the Student Councils in the County of Devon are working.

These two case studies have been considered in some detail as they show the care with which some councils set up genuine and effective young people's participation. South Derbyshire did this in the limited area of youth clubs and youth service. Devon has done it in the area of county politics. That both have worked demonstrates that an attention to detail and a willingness to listen to what young people actually say and not where adults might like them to say, can deliver effective and empowering participatory infra-structures for young people. Similar infrastructures may be set up for every children's initiative whether local, national or international. Details like transport to meetings are critical - children do not have cars and parents worry about them cycling or taking busses at night to distant destinations. Likewise the importance of where they meet, how often, how exactly the young people elect their representatives, what their terms of reference are and the business of multiple representation - all derive from the young people's culture, with which the creators of the South Derbyshire and Devon County Council experiments are clearly in sympathy.

An opposite, but equally interesting, report of young people's participation came from the City of Leeds.¹⁰⁴ As part of its Environmental City obligations, the city authorities undertook a city-wide consultation of young people. These consultations threw up an alarming number of expensive and outrageous ideas for city improvement from the young

people. The city councillors considered their ideas and the proposal to set up a Youth Council and decided to reject both, as they recognised that they would never have the budgets to meet the aspirations of the young people who would therefore end up feeling betrayed and disillusioned with city politics. The Environmental City secretariat deplored their decision:

"Just because, today, you do not have the funds to fulfil all the ideas generated by young citizens is not a reason to silence them. It is only by producing hundreds and hundreds of new ideas - some that can be realised today, others that may be realised twenty years hence - that our community can continue to grow and be assured of its future!"¹⁰⁵

Such experiments should all be seen in the context of the Thompson Report on the Youth Service¹⁰⁶ which devotes considerable space to Political or Citizenship Education. The latter is exactly what the South Derbyshire Power Pack experiment aims to provide. It is defined in the excellent Spotlight on Citizenship, published by Save the Children, as follows. Good citizenship education means ...

- you are helping young people to acquire the skills and confidence to play an active part in the life of their community;
- you are helping young people develop a belief in democracy and a positive approach to human rights and justice for all;
- you are helping young people to extend their understanding of moral, social and political issues."¹⁰⁷

Thompson highlighted the importance of the Youth Service in engaging in political education by offering young people experiences which enable them to "learn to claim their right to influence the society in which they live and have a say in how it is run."¹⁰⁸ Thompson also urged the Youth Service to adopt a hands-on participative approach by offering a "scene of political activity addressed to such issues which are of concern to young people..." Recognising that this might arouse controversy, Thompson concluded that "while political education of this kind is not a 'safe' thing, neither is democracy and one will not flourish without the other."¹⁰⁸

Conclusions

The major conclusion of the survey of young people's participation in local governance is that the vast, latent reservoir of talent and energy

of young people is available to society to draw upon. However, there is no clear road map to this field, no signposts. The details of how to achieve effective children's participation are blurred and often contradictory. There is simply not enough carefully assembled data systemically describing different models to construct helpful methodologies. Publications like Hart's *Children's Participation*¹⁰⁰ offer ideas but no comprehensive direction. Maybe this would be impossible and unrealistic for an international review, but it is surely possible at national or regional levels. However exploration at that level is still extremely limited, and the search for directions and methodologies could be very helpful to all practitioners engaged in the field. The energy of young people is waiting, ready to be unleashed. It is not the easiest of energy sources to tame because, like the rest of society, it wants to feel acknowledged, empowered, and respected. The techniques for doing this at the local level are within our grasp. No legal revolution is required to enable it, arguably just some political will.

REFERENCES

66. Case reported by Children's Rights Centre, London, 1996
67. Case exposed by News of the World, September 14th 1995
68. Lansdowne, G. Taking Part, IPPR, 1996 Page 21
69. Preliminary Report on Observance of Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Vienna 1997) Page 6
70. Rescue Mission Action Update, London 1996, Page 3
71. Jones, G. & Wallace, C. Youth Family and Citizenship, Open University 1992, Page 132
72. Quoted in ANACEJ Newsletter, December 1993, Page 4
73. Pines, D. Review of Youth Action Councils, Dept. of Health and Social Security, Washington DC 1992;
74. Hart, R. From Tokenism to Partnership, (UN Innocenti Papers 1996) Page 14
75. Ibid. Page 16
76. *Hart has told this author that he deems the experiment in East Harlem to be a failure as the model has not been taken up by any other garden department elsewhere in the city. I argue that this shows not so much that the model failed but that his organisation did not place sufficient priority in promoting the model to city government officials - or that the officials themselves were politically blind to the possibilities.*
77. Reported in Youth Policy, October 1996, Page: 19;
78. Hill, J. et al: Listening to Smaller Voices, ActionAid, March 1995:
79. Report on Children's Participation, PLA Notes, No 25, February 1996, P.61
80. Hill, J. et al: Listening to Smaller Voices, ActionAid, March 1995. Page 5
81. Ibid. Page 4
82. Ibid. Page 6
83. Ibid. Page 48
84. Ibid. Page 6 (quote)
85. Ibid. Page 2; Ibid. Page 28
86. Kids Planet Video Report, Series II, Episode VI:

87. Norwegian Youth for Rio Newsletter, May-June 1992;
88. Reebok Centre for Human Rights 1995 Report; Page 10-14
89. Conversation between the author and Dr Ewan Anderson, September 1993;
90. Scene, November 1988, Page 1
91. Willow, C. Hear Hear, LGIU, February 1997
92. Ibid. Page 4
93. UNICEF, State of the World's Children '97, Oxford University Press, Page 10
94. Ibid. Page 9
95. The Totally Excellent Parish Council Handbook, Hampshire Association of Parish Councils, Winchester, Hants; Stories recorded in the Handbook:
96. Hampshire County Gazette, No 414, June 1995 Page 14
97. Ibid. Report on Oakley Youth Initiative, Page 15
98. Scottish Child, January 1992, Page 32;
99. South Derbyshire County Council Review, June 1991, Page 18;
100. Ibid. Page 9
101. Ibid. Page 17
102. Ibid. Page 19
103. Devon Youth Council Constitution, Devon County Council, 1994;
104. Leeds Environment City, Report, 1994;
105. Ibid. Page 27
106. Thompson, Lord. Effective Youth Participation in the Youth Service, HMSO 1982, Page 47-49
107. White, P. Spotlight on Citizenship, Save The Children, 1995
108. Thompson, Lord. Effective Youth Participation in the Youth Service, HMSO 1982, Page 47-49
109. Hart, R. Children's Participation, Earthscan 1997;

Chapter Five

Analysis of the evolution of Peace Child and its experience in young people's participation

As mentioned in the Preface, initial enthusiasm for this thesis came from this author's experience working on Peace Child projects around the world. A personal concern about the failure of international projects to involve young people more usefully in their planning and execution derived from personal experience of their failure at first hand. At the same time, equally personal experience in my own projects had demonstrated how happy and productive partnership between adults and young people in the governance of projects can be. Having evolved an approach and methodologies to young people's participation over 16 years of experience, the records of that experience are a useful resource for understanding both the potentials and the pitfalls of engaging in such partnerships. In order to support the suggestion that young people's participation in governance is a workable and constructive option, I place as a major part of this thesis an analysis of my own experience in developing the Peace Child projects and organisation.

5.1 History:

Peace Child was never intended to be an exercise in including children in governance. It started out merely as the mounting of a musical play which I did to satisfy the need of a Peace organisation with which I was involved to mount a "Celebration for Peace!" I have kept copious diaries throughout the seventeen years of working with Peace Child which may illuminate the dark corners of this subject. Here is an annotated history:

1981: Beginnings: The musical play, *Peace Child*, was written by this author based on songs by David Gordon and 'The Peace Book' by Bernard Benson. There was much legal wrangling about who owned the copyright and finally it was vested in the three of us. At the same time, a Charitable Trust was set up to promote and administer the play and its message of peace throughout the world. The Mission was first expressed as "harnessing the arts in the service of peace." It quickly changed as a result of an incident that happened during rehearsal for the first perfor-

mance. I recorded it thus:

Tuesday Sept. 11th 1981:

"Chris and Dominic are a joy - they are so funny together on stage, they have no fear. Just looking at them makes me laugh. I drove them home today with Elise and Mustapha and they were blathering away in the back seat. They think the ending is weak:

"Just having the Soviet and American Presidents change places for a month would be stupid!" said Chris. "It wouldn't work because Mr Reagan speaks no Russian and Mr Andropov doesn't speak English."

"It would be chaos!" said Dominic.

"That's what happens in the book," I said.

"The book sucks," said Elise

"The kids should change places," said Chris. "They'd learn each other's language!"

"You never would!" I said

"I would!" said Dominic. "I'd learn Russian if I thought it would help end a nuclear war."

"The ending has to be that the kids change places, and demand that every American and every Soviet kid spend a year in the other's country as part of their education," said Mustapha.

"Every kid!" I said " - can you imagine what that would cost in airfares?!"

"A Hell of a lot less than a nuclear weapon!" said Chris

" - and a great deal less than the cost of cleaning up what would happen if one went off!" added Elise.

"You have to do it, you have to change the ending..." declared Dominic.

Intuitively, I felt they were right, but I had spent a long time writing and constructing a witty scene which just about made sense of the ridiculous notion of the Russian and American Presidents taking over executive control of each other's administrations. I was reluctant to change what I knew could be a funny and entertaining climax to the play - and I was also reluctant to offend my co-author. However, he is not around and the kids are. It is their play - they are taking the risk stepping out there in front of a huge audience. It has to be real for them. So I'm going to change it.

I did change it. In the remaining weeks of rehearsal, I ended up changing much of the play to reflect the language styles and ideas of the kids. The play was much improved as a result. I drew on the children's voice rhythms, the idiosyncrasies of their speech, their jokes and the words they liked to use in conversation. The characters had no names: they were just Chris, Dominic, Elise and Mustapha in the play as they were in real life. Yet in the musical, their characters brought about the end of the Cold War and the elimination of the threat of nuclear war. That is what we all dreamed they might do in real life as well. Mr Benson, the author,

never complained about the changes the children made to his original story. He and the composer agreed, it was the kids play. The Mission of Peace Child became "Empowering Children". The way we chose to do this was to give them a platform, and a powerful emotional framework, in which to express their deepest concerns and hopes for their future. Though the rights in Peace Child remained legally ours, the content of the play was changed every time by the children of the cast. They owned the script and their performances.

1982: Move to the USA: the first performance in Washington DC requires a total re-write of the script based on the ideas and personalities of the young US-performers whose ideas on peace and ending the Cold War are politically controversial. The play arouses some hostility in Republican government circles. My diary records the controversy as it emerged through the rehearsal process:

September 13th 1982

"These American kids are very forthright and articulate. Bridget (who plays the Russian lead) came in today with a story about her class discussing what she is doing. They all know that she is playing a Russian girl at the Kennedy Centre, and most of them mock her for it. Even her teacher could find no redeeming features about Russian people that might help her believe in her character.

"They all think that Russians are out to kill us, and the worst scum of the earth. 'Scumbag commie' is what they call me, and they think that my character should reflect that."

"Needless to say, Bridget and I think of her character as a beautiful, innocent lovely girl who reads Pushkin every night, listens to Tchaikovsky and adores the plays of Chekov. We have gone further: her mother found some Russian folk tales in the library - gorgeously illustrated and delightful. But this cuts no ice with her classmates or her social studies teacher. "That was the Russia of the past," they say, "before it was corrupted by communism!"

"I am gobsmacked by the taunts that she has to put up with - but she bears no grudges: she turns up at rehearsals and gets on with it. To a greater or lesser extent, the rest of the cast has the same problem to deal with - except the black gospel choir kids: they just see this as a chance to exercise their voices in pursuit of Peace. Praise the Lord!! They are the best! It is the white kids from the Maryland and Virginia suburbs whose parents or whose friends parents work in the Pentagon or the US government - they are threatened by what we are doing.

"I have not forced any message upon them - but they are even more convinced than the British cast that this is a Soviet-American story, and that the US must make peace with the USSR. The Cold War must end and, impossible thought it may seem, what we are doing right now is playing a part in bringing it to an end."

1983: Publication of Peace Child Study Guide - the Guide contains a copy of the script and lesson plans which explore the issues raised in each scene. The Guide is designed to enable teachers and producers to create their own version of the Peace Child story by challenging their young cast to come up with their own scenes, songs and ideas for how Peace should be secured between USA and USSR. In the Introduction¹⁰, I explain the process thus:

"Peace Child is not so much a performance as a process. The performance is the tip of the iceberg, the cherry on the cake. The real work lies beneath. The process begins when you audition the children - find out about them, what makes them tick, what they believe. In the kids that you choose to be in your core cast will lie the seeds of what your play will be about. Their personalities, their beliefs, their idiosyncrasies will be what will be communicated to the audience. You can lay your own beliefs over that - your philosophy about the insanity of nuclear weapons, about the necessity of peace with the Russians, about ending poverty or cleaning up the environment, whatever your passions may be - but ringing through with a clarion call in every Peace Child play that is done right will be the glistening reality of the children who perform it. Your passions must reflect and support their concerns and passions: if they are at odds, you must surrender yours to theirs for it will be them, not you, out on stage presenting them!"

In discussing principles of young people's participation, (Section 5.2 below) I describe this as giving ownership of the play to the children. At this point, it seemed to be the best way to get good and coherent performances out of young people.

1984: Peace Child goes to the USSR. Negotiations for a performance in Russia start. Meanwhile, several hundred performances of Peace Child have been presented throughout the USA. Most are popular, generate a lot of press, and get audiences thinking about how the Cold War will end.

Thursday 14th October 1984:

"Trustees Meeting today full of talk about the 'Magic of Peace Child'! Lucia (*the Peace Child administrator*) did a count and, according to her records, there have been 584 performances of Peace Child in 39 states across the USA in the last 18 months. If they all used the Study Guide as well as the Green Bay group, that means hundreds of very different Peace Childs entering the minds and hearts of young Americans and their parents across the USA. That means hundreds, maybe thousands of 'Bridgets' having conversations with their teachers, parents, peers about the 'scumbag com-

mies.' If children only initiate such conversations with their parents and friends around dinner tables, Peace Child is having a political effect. If parents and friends go to see the show and weep as their children protest movingly about their fear of death in a nuclear war, and their desire to make friends with Russians, they are having a political impact. And, according to Lucia, each show generates 5-10 pieces in the press and on local TV and radio. Big impact. Great!"

5th April 1985:

"First week in Russia over and, as I knew, Bridget and I were right about the place and its people. They are completely wonderful - so cute and pretty the kids, in spite of their cheap clothes and awful flats. The light of hope shines in their eyes, and they have so many ideas, so much talent. I cannot wait to get them together with the Americans to do the show. Today I know, the Peace Child story will come true. Peace will happen. It is only a matter of time."

1985: First performance in Russia: For the first time, US and Soviet children take on the roles of Soviet and American characters in the Peace Child play. The performances have a great impact in the USSR.

Monday July 27th 1985:

"Today they met. The American and Soviet Peace Children. It was a clumsy moment in a backstreet theatre. Colleen hugged them, and spoke her broken Russian through tears as was to be expected. But she was the only one. The others just said "Hi!" like it was a first day at school in a Washington school yard. They were not impressed, like I was, that this was a day that I had worked towards for five years. To me, it was as extraordinary as watching people walking on the moon - and the normalcy of it made the moment even more memorable. They just started to rehearse that ridiculous song: "Mwi zhelayem Shastya vam" - we wish you happiness! Which I translated on the back of a Peace Child brochure last night. Why are kids so cool? Why don't they get when they are making history?"

US child Peace ambassador, Samantha Smith, died in a plane crash while we were in the Soviet Union performing Peace Child. We were invited to do a memorial programme for Soviet and American TV. It was broadcast days after the first Reagan-Gorbachev summit and was seen by millions of Americans and Russians.

Friday December 3rd 1985:

"The space bridge TV programme was planned down to the last second - every shot story-boarded, every move choreographed - except for one moment, when the kids were going to read letters to each other. And that was the moment that Ella chose to make her contribution which changed the whole shape of the show: she

stepped forward from the choral risers and said, direct to camera,

'This is so important, that we say that we love each other, that we are friends and that we will be friends for ever. It is important to say this and not just to sing songs and hold hands on the TV screen. Americans! I love you!!'

"It was so unexpected - even the Russian camera staff did not know what to do: they held back, not zooming in on her intense face and glistening eyes. But the cheers from the Americans were captured in great close-up, Tony and Steve wiping the tears from their eyes. It was so great, so joyous - a moment when a young person, just by being young and spontaneous, cut open that best-planned media event and let the blood of reality flow freely, allowing all to feel the raw happiness that she was experiencing."

1986: First US-Soviet Tour: Peace Child brought the first Soviet kids and the first Soviet Rock group to the USA for a youth-cultural exchange. We mounted a major tour of 12 US and one Canadian city. The performances made a powerful impact on audiences and media but the Reagan administration distanced itself from it, even though his State Dept. had initially encouraged it. Apparently they felt it was good to bring Soviet children to the USA on young people's exchanges but bad to encourage them to discuss the issue of nuclear defence. By fighting long and hard with Soviet ministries to enable the tour to happen at all, a log-jam was broken and hundreds of young people's exchange initiatives that had previously been forbidden started to happen.

1987: More Exchanges: Peace Child organises three Youth Cultural Exchange Programmes involving 100 Soviet and American kids. Each performance is different, and each makes a powerful impact on audiences both sides of the Atlantic;

1988: Beyond the US-Soviet issue: this year saw the peak in the number of Peace Child Youth Cultural Exchanges. Eighteen Productions took place - seven in the USSR, nine in the USA, one each in Central America and Poland. One of the US productions included children of thirteen nationalities and dealt with the environmental issues surrounding the Chernobyl disaster. In addition, the Peace Child Middle East programme opened up in Israel.

1989: Europe: 11 Youth Cultural Exchange Programmes were organised including one in South Africa, one in Japan and one in Central America.

The Peace Child International Headquarters are moved to Europe to expand the programme in Eastern and Central Europe.

1990: US Peace Child declines: In the aftermath of the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the economic basis of the Peace Child youth cultural programmes in the Soviet Union foundered. There was no longer the young people's pioneer infra-structure to support our programmes. Also, the Gulf War began, and skirmishes broke out between the Soviet army and the Baltic states in which several people died. American parents did not want their children to travel anywhere least of all to the former Soviet Union. From Europe, David Woollcombe urged restraint and budget-cutting on the US office: the new US director ignored his advice and he resigns from the operation. The US organisation goes heavily into debt as it is only able to set up four programmes. It eventually collapses in 1994 when it is discovered that the director failed to pay US withholding taxes leaving the directors with a six-figure debt to pay off.

1991: Peace Child International set up in Europe: The European Headquarters, working from a temporary base in the Netherlands, organised a Festival for the Future in Hungary, Czech Republic and Yugoslavia bringing together young people from the post-communist world to imagine a future peaceful world. Peace Child also started production of its first publication venture - *the Children's State of the Planet Handbook*. It will be written, edited, designed and illustrated by young people throughout the world. It was not an immediate success:

Monday 11th September 1991:

"This book business is looking bad. Eve (American, 21) and I went through the material brought back from Prague for the Children's State of the Planet Handbook and she said it: "It's crap!" What to do? It goes back to the conversation Analía (*the young people's editor, Argentinian, 18*) and I had at the start of the process: it was obvious that she and I could sit down and write the book right there and then with no help from the other kids but that was not the point. The point was that they should all participate - contribute their ideas and their paintings and poems. And they did - and it was, as Eve so delicately put it, crap. Well, it is not all crap: there is Julian's planetary gearstick, Daniela's bicycle, Irena's cartoon - one or two isolated bits and pieces, and other things that we have collected like the Native American 'Healing Generation' page and Emma's environmental crossword.

"In fact, thinking about it, there is a hell of a lot we could include.

But, it is not in an order and Eve clearly doesn't have the energy to put it all together. So should I, or should I send it all off to Analia and say, 'Make something of this!' She won't. She's got school - she's fed up with the kids who did not deliver in the way she hoped. So, in the spirit of partnership, I must support her. I will finish a version of it, and take it over to her when I am there next month. Eve will help and maintain the young people's supervision but I am certain that this is the only way that the book is going to get finished. Emma is back in November - she will go through it with a fine tooth-comb and make sure it is up to scratch. But before then, it will help every one if there is a rough draft for them to work on. I am not disempowering young people by doing that for them, am I? I am supporting them to get the job done.

"It is so different making books from making plays: in the plays, it is partly the kids egos that give them the energy to go out and sweat and dance and sing their hearts out in front of the audience. I cannot support them once they are on stage - I can only manage the lights and ensure that the sound system is working and supervise the construction of the script to ensure that it makes sense and hangs together. Once on stage, they are entirely on their own - and they always deliver! Making books is different - the moment of truth comes when you deliver to the printers. If the book is not in the right format, or the paste-up is unclear, it is impossible for the printer to do his work. That is why the level of adult support in the book-making partnership must be higher. No skin off the kids noses: they want to see the book finished as much as they wanted to get out on stage to do the final performance. Each feeds their egos and makes them feel important. Is that a bad thing?"

1992:Rio Earth Summit: The *Children's State of the Planet Handbook* is launched at the Rio Earth Summit in June. UN staff are thrilled by it and invite Peace Child to create a Children's Edition of Agenda 21.

1993: Headquarters move to UK: The new International Headquarters for Peace Child is the White House, Buntingford, UK. Young people successfully partnered the creation of plays and then books: living in a hostel on the grounds, they will now work together with adults in the running of the organisation. The Management structure of Peace Child is very simple: a Board of adult Trustees take care of the fiduciary responsibilities of the organisation (- presenting accounts to the charity commissioners, making sure all legal and constitutional requirements are met etc.) A Board of Peace Child Representatives made up of young people who do Peace Child projects around the world, plus representatives of our four UN sponsoring agencies - UNEP, UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO + the staff directors, Rosey Simonds and David Woollcombe, take all decisions on which projects to pursue, strategy etc. The day-to-day running

of the projects, the raising of funds, and the support of our groups around the world is done by the staff directors, assisted by student interns. The problem was, before we had the White House, there was nowhere for the interns to live: it was always the hope that, if we could get the interns living on site, they would take over more and more responsibility for the management of individual projects, including finance management and fund-raising.

In the best Peace Child tradition, the hostel at the White House is designed and built by young people led by Jiri Vaculik, (19 Czech Republic), an Architectural student from Prague. "You gave me a chance to prove to myself that I can be an architect. You took an £85,000 risk on me which was crazy, but that is the essence of Peace Child. I am glad that there is such an organisation in the world."¹¹⁰

It was, indeed, crazy to entrust an £85,000 building project to a 19-year old but no more crazy than entrusting a \$750,000 US-Soviet children's musical tour to a bunch of untrained student performers: or a \$100,000 book! The sums involved in Peace Child ventures were quite large, but they were an expression of the confidence that we, and others, felt in the ability of children and young people to deliver.

Also in this year, Peace Child produced *Rescue Mission : Planet Earth* - a Children's Edition of Agenda 21 directly sponsored by UNEP, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP. Some 10,000 children from 220 groups in 100 countries around the world selected sections from the original Agenda 21 text, made summaries of them, painted pictures inspired by them and wrote poems and case studies about situations relating to the problems they referred to. It was an immensely satisfying project:

Wednesday 15th September 1993:

"So today, Rescue Mission goes to the printers and I feel great! Why has this been the most satisfying project of my life? So many things: there was the memorable first day when José Luis crossed swords in the friendliest possible way with David West (professional book designer) and changed the whole grid for the book. David was not even miffed: "It's their book! José Luis is a great designer - even though he is only 21. Do it his way!" I was not so magnanimous: that same day, as I fetched Margaret, the Nigerian girl, from the airport, Dan (US, 22) held a meeting to talk about the thematic structure of the book. He had no idea that I would want to be there so much - anyway, they changed the whole approach of using the Rescue Mission man as the guide through the book, and decided that chapter would follow chapter using the internal logic of the original Agenda 21. Fine - I thought it was a lousy idea, that mine

was much better but they threw mine out.

"Had I been there, the result might have been different: as Mark (the replacement director of Peace Child USA who had driven the organisation into bankruptcy) used to say: "Any teacher worth his salt given twenty minutes, can get a room full of kids to support just about any idea that he puts before them." True, possibly, but that astoundingly misses the complete point of Peace Child!! The reason I felt so good and proud about this project was that Rosey and I and David West and the publishers were servants to the kids. They set the design, they controlled the text; they set the architecture of the book and fitted in the paintings that they chose. The result is entirely their's. Even the index was done by them - something that I always felt would be my job. They did it all! And it's good - very good. I love it.

October 19th 1993:

"Took Naomi and Tania to UNESCO today to launch Rescue Mission. Wonderful ceremony in a packed chamber - the two girls were spectacular, but two moments will stay in my mind: first, waiting at the Victoria Bus Station where I met Naomi off the Oxford bus and gave her the printed copy of the book. She looked at it in a daze - never have I seen a young person so proud and pleased with her achievement. I went off for half an hour to make some phone calls, and get the tickets. When I came back, she was still sitting in exactly the same spot, going through the book, page by page, stroking it in wonder. "I can't believe we actually did all this!" she said as I came up. "This is one of the proudest moments of my life..."

"Her pride was somewhat shattered the following night when, after the glorious presentation at UNESCO, we went round to give Jacques Cousteau a copy. He had been at Rio and I had become friendly with his education officer. We thought to ask him to do the introduction to the French Edition. The officer took the book into him as Tanya, Naomi and I waited outside. About ten minutes later, the officer came out shaking his head.

'I am sorry,' he said, 'Monsieur Cousteau will not see you! He doesn't like the book and he is quite certain that it is not produced by young people. It is produced by adults pretending to be young people....'

"And he did not see us: he refused to have his personal intuition refuted by two kids who had actually created the book. Such is the resistance of some people to the idea of children's participation: a person as wise as Cousteau refuses to believe that young people could produce a book like this on their own: he is certain that they are pawns in an adult publisher's promotional game. It is breathtaking!!

"However, who cares about Cousteau! The book is great and we shall do a French edition without him and it will sell millions!"

Reading these lines some 18 months later, when the book has sold some hundreds of thousands, if not millions, - it has to be acknowledged that Cousteau was, in a sense, right: the two girls sitting outside his office did

indeed do most of the work to create the book, but the reason that it worked was that they were supported in a partnership by one of the best editors of children's books, Jane Olliver, and one of the best designers - David West. As it happened, they did not do very much because we were blessed with a brilliant team of young people: but Jane and David's experience told them that. Had it not been so, they would have taken steps to adjust the process. To that extent, it was their book - and mine too - as well as the kids.

1994: Rescue Mission launched: The book was launched with great success at the United Nations in New York. It hits the best-seller lists, is translated into 18 languages and 320,000 copies are eventually sold.

As a direct result, the UN 50th Anniversary Secretariat invited Peace Child to produce a *Children's History of the United Nations*. In stark contrast to Rescue Mission, the project was beset by difficulties that resulted in many of the youth participants feeling dis-empowered.

April 3rd 1995:

"Unquestionably the worst day in my whole work with Peace Child. Nicole Geiger is my nemesis. At a stroke, she has slashed down the whole Peace Child edifice of young people's empowerment which it was our mission to set up. She is the editor, appointed by Ten Speed press to convey our book to their printers, and complete it. Perhaps 40 years old, unbelievably rude, insecure, cruel and completely uncaring about the role of children in the creative process, she came in here today, sweeping past Rosey in the hall saying "This smells like chaos!" and trumpeting charges of incompetence and breach of contract all round. We had all felt rather good before she arrived: I was thinking that the book was about 80% there and that with some creative help from Nicole whom we had all liked when we met her in San Francisco, the extra 20% might be forthcoming. No way. She hated José Luis (*the youth designer*) before she'd even met him, putting her trust in the odious Sian (*the "David West" of this project - a professional designer*). She basically fired José Luis saying that all the final design work would be done in London at Sian's studio.

"We sat round the table in the dining room listening to her as she "took charge!" Every one else found an excuse to be elsewhere. Karina, Rosey, Cecilia, Daniela - all thought of things that they simply had to do, so I was left with Nicole who threatened to stop the publication if I should so much as question any of her decisions. I felt extremely cornered. None of the kids who had worked on the book would thank me if, out of some residual concern for principle, I challenged the publisher's representative and ensured that the book would not be printed. So I went with the flow - for in a sense, the book had already been buried by the UN's breach of contract: they had said that the young people would be able to say whatever they

liked about the UN and its performance in Bosnia, Tibet, East Timor etc. But, due to pressure from above, that editorial freedom was quickly withdrawn with no consultation.

"I suppose we could have objected but UN money was sustaining the organisation - and building our young people's hostel - so we persuaded ourselves it was a good way of learning how to operate in the real world. Now, the appearance of the tyrannical Nicole, makes the UN censors look very friendly indeed. The UN censorship probably altered the book more than Nicole has: during the editorial process, the kids were always trying to second-guess what the UN would censor and cutting things that might have got through. So maybe our relationship with the UN is being saved by the madness of Nicole - but both have completely misunderstood the nature of young people's empowerment, and do not recognise a single jot of what we are trying to do in Peace Child.

"Never Again!! If we do a Children's book of Human Rights - I will not take a cent of UN money, and I will find another publisher who understands the ground rules like Jane Olliver and David West did."

1995: Further experience with the United Nations and CSD: *The Children's History of the United Nations* is produced. It is well-received: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali's wife declares it to be the best book she has ever read about the UN! But sales are not as high as those of *Rescue Mission*. The UN Commission for Sustainable Development invited Peace Child to help prepare a UN Youth Panel to discuss how young people can be involved in the implementation of Agenda 21. So we created a young people's sustainable development monitoring project - "Sustainability Indicators". This gets groups around the world involved in monitoring progress towards implementation of Agenda 21.

At its meeting in the UK in November, the Peace Child Board of Representatives agreed that a young person (aged 15-25) should work as my co-director. This, it was felt, would symbolise our commitment to involving young people in decision-making as required by Agenda 21. To me, this would be the zenith of my experiment in young people's participation. I accepted and supported the Board's decision with enthusiasm. However, as a moment's fore-thought might have signalled, the effort was not entirely successful. My diary records it thus:

May 1st 1995:

"Cecilia (age 20, Finnish) starts work today as my co-director!! From here on in, no cheque will be signed, no decision made without consulting her. Terrifying? No - perfect! Nothing ever again will be entirely my fault! So is this co-directorship just a way of you chickening out of taking responsibility? I hope not: it is a way of saying to the world that Peace Child is not an organisation led by adults or

young people alone. It is led by a partnership. The fact that Cecilia is remarkably talented in areas that I am not - like in painting, lay-out, cartoons etc. - is important. We complement each other well - but that is not the main point. The main thing is that funders and governments will see that Peace Child is serious about implementing those clauses about young people's participation in decision-making that they have not been able to implement in their own systems."

May 3rd 1996:

"So today the Rescue Mission Board ended Cecilia's term as Co-director and abolished the position. Cecilia is feeling totally crest-fallen as though she has failed me, failed the organisation and the whole principle of young people's partnership. I feel like there has been an ending, but I do feel that a good decision has been reached. Maybe it was just because of Cecilia's arrogant personality that the role of Co-director was untenable, but I think there is something deeper at fault here. It is to do with the limitations on young people's participation. It is simply not realistic to expect a young person to sit alongside some one twice their age and take equal responsibility for each decision.

"For a start, she is not married, she has no family. Failing for her would mean returning to her mother's home in Finland, where for me, it would mean the dole and humiliation. I have much more at stake than she - and it is natural for me to want to take ownership of important decisions. She therefore frequently felt let down by me - like I was continuing to run the organisation as I always had, and that she was just an extra decoration on the side. She was, I suppose - but that did not belie the effort I put into making it work: including her in every decision, making her a co-signatory on the cheque book, co-signing every major letter, sending her as a representative of the organisation to major meetings. The real reason it did not work was that she was unable, or unwilling, to take up the reins of leadership as firmly as I was. How could she? - she had only worked with the organisation for a few months: she couldn't possibly have the contacts or the ideas that I had after working for it for fifteen years.

"However, to me the discipline of having to run every idea past a young person was extremely valuable. Her sharpness saw into many inconsistencies that I would not have noticed. The new system, in which young people are made project directors, means that this young people's-monitoring of me will continue but instead of having one young person doing it, there will be up to a dozen of them, each with responsibility for different areas. This will be a strain for me as instead of having just one person's insecurities to deal with, I shall now have 12! But, on balance, I think it is a good decision, and the principle of young people working in partnership with adults will continue on a stronger foundation than it has for the past year."

1996: Sustainability Indicators: The Second Draft of the Indicators Pack was produced, plus a report, *Mission Made Possible*, outlining

achievements in the first year. Plans for Sustainable Development Training Centres, owned and operated by young people from North and South in developing countries, were prepared. Funds are sought for other publications - a *Children's Book of Human Rights*, a *Children's State of the Planet TV Spectacular*, a *Children's Global Environmental Overview*, a *Children's Introduction to Human Development* and several other projects.

1997: A Continual struggle for Funding: A Second Report prepared by Rescue Mission FutureWatch was presented to the Fifth CSD Meeting and the UN's Fifth Anniversary Review of the Rio Agenda 21. Work starts on the Human Rights Book but most of the time is taken up in seeking funds to keep the Rescue Mission network of young people's groups around the world funded and active. A major Millennium Children's Conference entered the planning stage to bring together 1,000 children for a meeting in 1999 to set priorities for the 21st Century.

In all these various ways, Peace Child and its Rescue Mission project became major business operations, managed by young people and adults in equal partnership. Although the co-directorship process did not work, the partnerships are real: as an adult, I feel I am a servant of the young people's enthusiasm and ideas - helping to realise them where possible and assisting their understanding of major world issues. The partnership is "equal" in so far that neither myself, as an adult, nor the young people, can do anything in isolation: we have to work together in order for any project to be successful. With young people continuously in the office, the organisation does have a special, youthful feel.

Peace Child is not unique in attempting this approach: several youth-run enterprises are in operation all over the world, most notably, perhaps, the Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales (AISEC). It is an international association of business studies graduates and under-graduates (age 19-25 approx.), their sole purpose is to arrange business internships for young people in different parts of the world. Entirely run by students for students, it has an international secretariat in Brussels, where the young staff change over every year. It is remarkably efficient and is always expanding. In 1996, it was busy trying to get western students internships in China, and Chinese business students internships in the west.

More modestly, the Young Theatre at Beaconsfield has been estab-

lished as an enterprise entirely run by young people, but with partnership support from adults in the shape of an adult Artistic Director. The success of the theatre was reported¹¹¹ by a retiring adult participant:

"The first benefit is the amazing enthusiasm and commitment that is a direct result of allowing the young members this level of control. A second - also a problem sometimes - is the complete fearlessness: during my time with the theatre group, the Youth Theatre has made a full size hollow tree, and a 13-set show requiring a complex moving landscape - the kind of idea that would terrify most adult theatre groups. The constantly changing membership is the only problem. For example, this year a full musical was staged in which the director, the musical director, the set designer and choreographer were 19 or under. Next year, all of them will have gone on to university or into jobs and so will not be available. A new approach for a different range of talents is required. But it will be the young people's decision: the artistic director will only nudge and advise.

"The young people learn their trade through an internal system of training in which they shadow older young people in their jobs. They learn rapidly and the loyalty of the team to each other, and of the older members to their young trainees is inspiring to experience. The standards of behaviour they expect from themselves is high and the committee is surprisingly strict: if a member is seen to be unreliable, the committee has been known to withdraw the coveted membership card."

A fifteen year old comments¹¹² on the Beaconsfield experience:

"I was given an opportunity to develop my basic acting skills and to see how a play is put together. I also learned how to be professional in my conduct with my chosen art form. I got a lead part in my second week in a one-act play then last year I got to write and direct a play about the Second World War. I know I made many mistakes, but I learned so much from first hand experience. Next time, the job will be easier... The group is very close and friendly and I made many of my best friends"

REFERENCES

108. Correspondence with Karina Gerlach & Zehra Aydin concerning UN CSD Youth projects, October/November 1996;
109. Woollcombe, D. Peace Child Study Guide for Schools, PCF, 1983;
110. Correspondence with Jiri Vaculik, September 1996;
111. Reality Magazine, No.1004, March 1993, Page 7
112. Ibid. Page 8

Chapter Six

TWELVE PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE

In reviewing the successes and failures of the seventeen year history of Peace Child, together with the literature studied and the observation of local and international programmes described in Chapters Three and Four, I have developed a list of twelve principles¹¹³ in which it may be argued that the keys to the successful involvement of young people in governance lie:

I. Ownership: the child must be have the sensation that the work being done belongs to him/her. Any sense that the final result belongs to a different set of people immediately diminishes their commitment to it.

From the history outlined above, it should be clear that this has been a guiding principle of Peace Child from the outset. It is a hard concept for a child to grasp. Children are brought up to look to parents or teachers for approval: their homework is marked by the teacher who returns it with his/her judgements scribbled on it. Their end of term report goes to the parent who judges a child's achievement over time. Thus the experience of taking ownership of a process is deeply unfamiliar and vaguely threatening to many young people.

Taking the example of Melissa in the San Francisco Peace Child show, the following notes from my diary record her experience:

Sunday July 10:

"Auditioned Melissa. She is perfect - I could listen to that silvery, bell-like voice all night. She is a little stiff and stagey but she will loosen up. I hope! Steve (my music director) is nervous about her."

Tuesday July 12:

"Melissa is quite hopeless at improvisation. She sits there like a pudding, hoping that I will not call on her to do anything. She wants a script - she seems to despise me for not having written it yet, and feels that her role cannot begin until I write it for her. Marcus is full of ideas - throwing new lines, new patterns of thought at her all the time, all pregnant with the possibility of response. But she bites into none of it. Maybe she was a big mistake. Steve grinned "I told you so!" this afternoon.

Friday July 15:

"Melissa still isn't getting it. Rosey (*the co-producer*) is quite worried as, though she sings the songs beautifully, she is very wooden in her scenes with Marcus. She takes no joy in the role - which is dire. I

took her to one side after the rehearsal and gave her a copy of Fate of the Earth, told her to read it, and understand that what I wanted was not some Juliet-character that I created to be on stage - but her. Her passion, her thoughts, her feelings. That is not the same as doing Dorothy but it could be more exciting. I sense her mother wants her to chuck it in - but Melissa is a game girl. I sense she is going to make it work.

Monday 18th July:

"Great rehearsal!! Melissa got it!! She is transformed!! Every one was shocked. Marcus looked like he'd been hit by a truck! In the improvisations, she hammered back at him with facts, statistics. I was so proud of her! She wasn't about to let him get away with anything. The US President looked significantly pole-axed as well and the Soviet president was lost for words. Best of all, Melissa is happy and finding out more about her real self. She is going to be the best Russian girl we have ever had. She sings beautifully, and now she has the energy to really become a Russian child fighting for Peace and an end to the Cold war.

"She really seems to believe it now - her face is all flushed and full of excitement. This is what can happen when a talented, bright young person is enabled to occupy a part rather than have it handed to them on a platter by an adult. How would it be if she was less talented? Like Marcus! He is a trier but he doesn't have a tenth of her talent, and now it shows.

"Is this unfair: does Peace Child have to be performed by geniuses in order for it to work? How do we then empower all those other less talented kids whom it is important to reach? It's a problem, but a not too serious one. All the kids were enlivened by Melissa's electrical presence today. Their personalities will be expanded by this experience. Marcus will be good - and it will be him, so that other less talented people in the audience will have the experience of being successful in their own terms even when being over-shadowed by some on who is transparently more talented. It's good for him and it's good for audiences."

Melissa went on to become the first Peace Child kid to go to Russia with a citizen's group and, like her character in the play, she made many Russian friends. She starred in the first US-Soviet Peace Child tour and in the first Peace Child Central America show, about the war in Nicaragua. Her commitment came from knowing that the "role" she was playing was her own - it was herself as she would like herself to be. For a child from a broken home, pushed by a stage mother with whom she did not get along, this was a transformative experience. Peace Child's mission is to 'empower children': no single element contributes more powerfully to this process than enabling each of them to take ownership of a project.

II. An Enabling Culture: in setting up child participation, the surroundings and the chemistry must be affirming to the child's culture and life-style. Kids are easily daunted, or deflected, by the trappings of adulthood - formality, suits, official bureaucratic processes. This can kill their creativity instantly. An example of this was when the Prime Minister of the Netherlands invited some Peace Child kids to discuss their ideas about nuclear disarmament and environment policy. My diary records the day:

Friday October 18th 1990:

"Awful day. The Arnhem cast came to the Hague to visit the Prime Minister and present their Peace Day Resolutions. Fred (our Dutch philanthropist) was there but apart from him we were surrounded by bureaucrats. We had a pre-meeting in the McDonalds and the kids were all full of life, and up for the meeting, but as soon as we entered the building, the life went out of them. The room itself where we were to meet was daunting in the extreme - huge panelled walls, banners hanging, and dark portraits of severe looking bureaucrats from history glowering down from the walls. The kids sat in their huge chairs as the Prime Minister and his entourage paraded in.

"The Prime Minister, Ruud Lubbers, is a genuinely nice guy and tried to put the kids at their ease by explaining the history of the room and its pictures. The result was the kids were even more daunted by the place in which they found themselves. They shuffled their papers and the resolutions which, in McDonalds, had sounded like a resonating call to action, sounded dead and defeated before it left their lips. The Prime Minister did not seem to realise that the kids wanted to discuss their resolutions. He simply gathered up their bits of paper, thanked them and left.

"Meeting back at McDonalds, the kids felt shattered. "He's not going to do anything..." they all agreed. Fred felt that he might - but he suggested that, were we to meet again, we should do it at his hockey club, after a game - in the locker-room."

This we did with a different set of kids - not in a locker room but at a conference where he was alone in a hotel room. The conversation flowed freely and the result was that all felt much happier about the outcome.

III. Real Power: a children's council or parliament must have real power to influence decision-makers or else the children will perceive their efforts to be useless, and quickly lose interest. The adults have to be prepared, selflessly and without guile, to let the kids 'win one!' They smell manipulation and, though they may still do what they are told, they will be resentful.

Too often, young people have experience of having no power at all.

Lansdown quotes¹¹³ dozens of children in care who say that their views and concerns are not dealt with at all. "Of 600 young people surveyed, as many as two in five felt that they were not listened to in case conferences and reviews:

"All I ask for in my reviews is to see my brothers and sister to see if they are OK, but nothing ever gets done about it."

"I never have the courage to talk because I am alone in the room with about five types of social worker. When I do speak, everyone doesn't listen."

"You get moved from one place to another. I went through about six places in a year and you never have a choice. They just tell you to get packed."¹¹⁴

The power issue may be focussed on the issue of smacking children. Adults are generally bigger than young people therefore they can assert their power over children by physical means. That physical power can only be over-ruled by demonstrating to young people that they have real political power. The essence of Peace Child and its publications is that the kids can see in an instant that they have real power in the project. The organisation guarantees that to them - and so do all that work with us. As we have seen, they were able to change the structure and design of the *Rescue Mission* book. They were able to change every facet of every Peace Child show. They were indeed encouraged to do so. That power contributes to their feeling of ownership. It is the essence of their empowerment.

Where it is not so, the process of young people's participation falls apart. In one school with which we worked closely, our teacher contact struggled to set up a Student Council - and succeeded. Each class elected a representative, and the council met productively through a term. At the end of it, they made their recommendations to the Board of Governors - who turned down every one of them, including a request by the girls to be allowed to wear thin dresses in the summer instead of heavy plaid kilts. The following term, our teacher found it impossible to reconvene the council. The students knew that it would be a waste of time.¹¹⁵

In our Children's History of the United Nations project, we had a contract giving editorial freedom to the young authors. The UN authori-

ties were forced to break that contract on instructions from their superiors with the result that each page of the book had to go to a UN lawyer for checking. This destroyed the kids real power in the project. It fatally under-cut its integrity and caused the book to be flawed.

In everything else we have done, the plays and the books genuinely represent the kids' opinions. We can conclude that there can be nothing tokenistic about young people's participation. The power has to be real or it is worthless.

IV. Expectations: harbouring unrealistic expectations of what the kids can do is destructive both for the children, and the adults working with them. If we encourage both kids and adults to expect nothing, then anything that happens is positive. This became a mantra in Peace Child as everybody knew that the goal of the project was to contribute to ending the Cold War and dissolve the threat of nuclear war. However, that was never the expectation. This is how I wrote about the issue in the Peace Child Newsletter¹¹⁶ after the first Soviet Tour:

Newsletter Article, September 1985:

"It's late at night, and I am just back from the Soviet Union and I should be jet-lagged to hell but I am not. I am just thrilled and excited because this was just one wonderful trip. Why was it so wonderful? I guess because we none of us had any expectations of it. When we were rehearsing at the Quaker Centre in Washington and performing at St Marks on Capitol Hill the day before we left, we knew that this might be the only performance that we would give. I had always said that, if we meet a few Russians, learn some of their songs and have them learn a few of our's and get to sing them on street corners, that would have been a huge success. That, I am sure, was what most of them expected. So, when they were ushered into recording studios, or on to stages in front of football stadia full of people, - or into the studios of Russia's night time news with the country's premier poet, - and, at the climax, into the Studio theatre of Russia's wonderful Children's Musical Theatre - they were amazed. It was all so unexpected. So too were the reviews - the article in Izvestia, the Greek journalist who was saying that Peace Child was the "Surprise success of the Festival". And the friendships that were forged: they were unexpected. Seeing Sasha - tall, handsome rock star of the Soviet Union, singing with Gwen, small, squat, black, 6 months pregnant nobody from Washington DC - was intensely moving for us as well as her. If Soviets and Americans can make music this beautiful together, the days of the Cold War are definitely numbered. Ella, Karina, Natasha, Laurie, Caitlin, Bridget, Colleen, Tony - you all made it happen. The peace we shall enjoy a few years hence is being built on your courage and your effort. Thank you."

Russian children did come to the USA. The Cold War did end. The threat of nuclear war has receded. In 1985/86, that was a fantasy, not an expectation. Any process of involving young people in governance has to keep their eyes fixed on the stars while at the same time keeping their feet firmly rooted to the ground.

V. Honour their forms of expression: Adults should correct a child's spelling etc. but they should honour the style of their language; in editing, look only for clarity; honour the colour of their language. Paintings, illustrations and other forms of expression should remain untouched. In this way, young people feel that the finished expression is essentially their own.

The UNESCO/Disney Children's Conference betrayed this principle completely when it hired professional artists to re-draw the children's pictures and got UNESCO experts to draft their Eco-Charter. Their work may indeed look slicker and more professional, but it is not kids' work. WWF recently did a school survey of what children felt the world should be like in 2012. The results were sent to a professional editor in London, and what emerged bore no relation to what the kids had written, even though they were quoted in it. The editor had managed to sanitise the kids' expression to the extent that it felt and looked like a government report, not a work by children.¹¹⁷

Peace Child is built on the integrity of the child's expression. Both in my work as a writer/editor, and in the composer, David Gordon's lyrics, we struggle to be child-like, not childish. The final form of the book or the play, therefore, reflects the children's reality, not one that we impose from outside. This is immensely important both to confirm the feeling of ownership for the child, and also for their empowerment. They recognise that their forms of expression are valid. This validity is confirmed when their books sell 320,000 copies, or when they see an audience of 2,500 people stand as one to applaud their work.

VI. Support: The recommendation must be to support the young people with adult experience, not to threaten them with it. Discourage them from feeling that they have to do everything themselves. Encourage them to lay off difficult tasks on adult professionals - like playing music for a show, preparing of colour layouts for printers, etc.

Producing musicals, publishing books and running a non-governmental organisation is a difficult business: achieving professional quality takes experience and talent which most kids do not have. Thus part of the empowerment of young people is to let them know that it is permissible to ask for help. In most Peace Child shows, there are not sufficiently talented musicians to play the performance. In one, in Minneapolis, there was - and the kids' band played superbly. In most Peace Child affiliates, kids do not do a good job of the accounts. In one, in Zanzibar, there is a superb student accountant, so that the group does not need the adult support in this area.

The essence of a partnership is to draw in the talent and expertise needed to ensure a high quality job. Even on occasions where young people decided to do their own productions of Peace Child, they were encouraged to engage adult support - if only to ferry kids back and forth to rehearsals. Such engagement dissolves the generation gap and empowers both adults and children to recognise their different qualities, and the different contributions they each can make. When they choose not to draw on adult support, the results can be disastrous. A recent example was the exhibition mounted by the UN Development Programme in the Foyer of the UN during the Fifth Anniversary Session of the Rio Earth Summit. This is how I recorded the incident:

Monday June 23rd 1997:

"So the Young people's Exhibit is now set up in the foyer of the United Nations. Is this a success or not? Back in April, I told the kids of the UN CSD Youth Working Group that I was happy to help them set it up, but the Rescue Mission kids would have none of it.

"We are too busy. Let the Canadians do it."

"Fine, but they'll screw it up," I told our team.

They realised they could not do it and passed the project over to a Swedish group who failed to read the UNDP criteria for the Exhibition. Their plan for the Young people's Exhibit was totally unrealistic and impractical and the UNDP committee promptly rejected it. Faced with the possibility of there being no exhibit by young people at this critical exhibition, UNDP knew of my interest and asked if I would help: I stepped in and produced a 2-page proposal in 20 minutes which went through the committee "on the nod" - and hey presto, the young people had an exhibition to put on.

"Now that might seem like severe interference by an adult, but I choose to characterise it as an adult working as a servant of the kids. They wanted an exhibit: they needed to draft a form of words that would enable them to get past a tricky bureaucratic committee process. I helped them do that. The Swedes were angry that their proposal had been rejected and chose not to participate in

the revised format for the exhibition. But that was their problem. Rescue Mission and the other thirty or so young people's groups in the Youth Task Force were on balance pleased that I had intervened and secured them the space."

VII. Respect: It is impossible for any kind of partnership to work without respect. Respect by children for adults is generally the product of all these other principles being observed. Adults' respect for the young partners has to be present at the start of the exercise: it is the essential component of the adult's attitude.

In Peace Child, there was a danger that some producers would go over-board in this area. "It is the kids' show, and the kids are right about everything!" In fact, the essence of the Peace Child partnership is that the adults should be able to assert when, from their experience, the kids are wrong. A vivid example of this took place on the Central America tour when the show had to be translated from Spanish to English in the transition from the tour in Central America to the tour in California. Some of the kids wanted to change the scenes - to improve the show. We only had three days to rehearse the new version and after two days of fairly diffuse discussion and re-writing, I had to call a halt and demand complete authority on the final day's rehearsal. Otherwise there could not be a performance that night. I had respected their right to question and re-organise the content of the show; most respected my right to take over the reins of control to ensure that the best possible performance was put on stage that night. And it worked. But it also resulted two days later in a brutal argument about why I had taken over: some of the kids were angry that, having felt totally in control of the re-writing process, I had suddenly moved in and ripped control away from them. It was an angry debate, but it came down to this question of respect - which finally all but one were able to accept. And the show went on. My diary from that time records the matter as a dispute between myself and the "Peace Child" who had become a "Peace Monster"! With a mission to empower, it is perhaps inevitable that sometimes one will over-empower a young person. The results are pretty catastrophic both for the child and for the person doing the empowering, as I found out through this incident:

August 29th 1997, Santa Cruz:

"Today it broke: Anne Henderson finally worked the cast up into a frenzy where they confronted me and accused me of destroying their

show. It was truly harsh! I don't suppose I have ever been so publicly humiliated in my whole life. Anne, the Peace Child Peace Monster! - led the attack because she was still hurt that I had cut her out of the final day's rehearsal in San Francisco: Rosey had warned me that this would happen. She said that I had allowed Anne to get too close to me - which was true: she spoke excellent Spanish and had a warm rapport with the Central American kids, so it was natural that I should use her as a bridge to the Spanish-speaking kids. She may have had a crush on me but it went no further than that: she was having a torrid affair with the drummer in the band for God's sake!!

"But something clearly snapped in her when I told her to shut up and can her ideas for re-writing the show that last day in San Francisco. The rest of the cast didn't have a problem then - they were pleased to get on and have their lines and cues firmed up for the show they had to do that night. But Anne glowered throughout, turning in a lousy, embittered performance, utterly contrary to the spirit of Peace Child. I suppose it didn't help that I told her that after the show, but she has three more shows to do here in Santa Cruz, and she has to get back into the swing of things. Instead of which, she planned this afternoon's meeting and got most of the cast to stand up behind her complaint that I had taken control of the show away from them. Part of their anger was a result of their stress: what other theatre company would create a new show in Spanish in two weeks, perform it in three countries, then translate it into English, bring it to a fourth, re-write it again, and put up a performance in a day?! A crazy schedule but the kids did it - and San Francisco was a good show!

"Not as good as tonight's though! This afternoon's little outburst cleared the air, and the kids got back on stage determined to sock it to them! Even Anne was terrific - except that her little "surprise" rather back-fired on her. Still determined to show me that she had control of the show, she had organised with the drummer to add a song at the end of a scene in the second act. It would have been fine, except that she omitted to tell me, or the lighting guy, what the surprise was. So when the scene came to an end, the lighting guy pushed the button for the next cue and the lights faded to black. I was in the box, and when Anne started her song, I realised what was happening so told the guy to go back to the previous cue so that Anne and the kids would have light for their song. But - computer lighting boards cannot go backwards! So poor Anne stood there in the dark for most of her song, which rather destroyed the effect!

"She made her point - that ultimately, I have no control on what the kids do or say out on the stage. But I also made mine: if kids and adults don't work in a partnership with respect for each other, the kids may end up doing their "doing and saying" in the dark!"

The incidence of Peace Monsters like Anne have been few. Several young people who pass through our programmes have shown tendencies in that direction. Now that my position as director of the Rescue Mission

project is dependent on the agreement of the Youth Board, incidents of taking control of projects away from kids do not arise. They are all their projects - started by them, pursued by them, and, in some cases, funded by them. Once they have brought a project to that level, my respect for them is total and all I can do is serve them. One example is of a young man in Senegal who started his own Rescue Mission project, hosted a West African Evaluation Conference, raised funds from the Dutch Embassy and printed a report on sustainable development in Senegal. Our headquarters organisation is purely in place to serve such a young person. The mutuality of respect is that they acknowledge what adults like myself are able to offer their project in terms of fund-raising, accounting, government and UN recognition etc.

There is clearly a conflict between the need for respect for me, as an adult, and the requirement that kids must have real power. In the Santa Cruz experience, the anger of the kids was a result of there not being sufficient transparency of where power ends and respect begins. In that case, it was not just respect for me, but also for the audience who had paid good money to come to see a show. To me, it was obvious: respect for the audience required that a degree of theatrical discipline be asserted in order that a show be put together that could work for that audience. If one strictly adhered to the youth adult partnership principle of shared power, the debate should have gone on until a resolution was reached democratically. If that had meant appearing on stage that night and apologising to the audience for not having got the show ready, so be it! At the time, I did not feel that I was under-cutting every principle of youth-adult participation that Peace Child stood for by not allowing that to happen: my punishment at the hands of Anne Henderson some days later showed that perhaps I was.

VIII. Openness and Communication: Adults and kids must communicate constantly and openly for any partnership to work. There will be secrets, there will be back-chat but harbouring corrosive feelings of malice and resentment, or trying to keep from kids difficult decisions, is utterly destructive to the process. The kids, and the adults, must feel able and supported to be totally open to each other. That is why that outburst and argument in Santa Cruz was essentially valuable for the youth-adult partnership in that production.

In the year that Cecilia worked as co-director, we had major problems with backchat and gossip. Bitterness among the other young people about her role went on for several weeks around the White House hostel. She felt totally hated and spurned by the other kids who felt indignant that she got a salary while the others worked as volunteers. In fact, some members of the Board had wanted to make her salary equal to mine so that she would be a real "Co-director" - but the majority saw the in-equity of this. Still, they wanted her to be paid.

For weeks, no one wanted to bring the problem out into the open. The Board with all its UN members had spoken and who were they to question its authority. Then one day, the Peace Child project coordinator, an adult, decided to call a meeting about it: it was a painful meeting, but it got the issue out into the open - and Cecilia was able to confront her own unhappiness in the position. Through that discussion, the system of young people's project coordinators and desk officers responsible for different areas of the Rescue Mission project was developed. The one young co-director would be replaced by a team of project co-directors, each with responsibilities, each with a salary, and each with a similar measure of respect and ownership of their part of the whole programme. Each project director also got him/herself a place on the Board of Directors so power was guaranteed. All were happy.

It seems an obvious point now in retrospect, but it is amazing how long dissatisfactions and hurts were concealed during the period leading up to that meeting. That concealment was extremely destructive to the atmosphere of a good youth/adult partnership.

IX. Time Alone: In any participation process, children must be encouraged to take time totally alone, with no adult presence and preferably in small groups. This enables the less forthright members of a group to come forward with ideas and feel included in the process. It also enables the strange chemistry that occurs between kids to produce the unexpected ideas and strategies that are the most lasting products of any youth/adult partnership.

This was a lesson we learned quite late in Peace Child. In the early days, we used to appoint kids to the Board of the US Peace Child Foundation, and they would come to meetings and sit silently, yawning from time to time. They called them the Bored Meetings as they really did

not feel there was a role for themselves in all the adult chat about accounts, and strategising etc. When it came to the first Peace Child Annual Conference, we decided that it would be good to let the kids have one afternoon where they would meet entirely by themselves, chiefly to give the adults time to meet without the presence of kids to inhibit them. At the end of the afternoon, the kids came back to the plenary meeting to report on what they had discussed and decided - and it was the most revealing and enlightening presentation of the entire conference. New ideas, new approaches, new programme ideas had emerged from their discussions. The ideas were not fully formed but they ploughed new furrows in the minds of the adults, opening us up to a multitude of new ideas and strategies.

From that point onwards, it has been a convention at every Peace Child conference or meeting to separate the children in a room by themselves for a couple of hours so that they can have complete freedom to say what they want and come up with what they feel to be priorities. Of course, the results have not always been as revelatory as they were on that first occasion, but they have generally produced some new thoughts and some new directions.

Likewise, adults having time alone can reflect soberly on what actually are good ideas from the kids, and which may be diversionary or impossible. The convention feeds the process of respect-building and is indispensable.

X. Access to necessary and appropriate information: No young person can participate effectively in governance without being equipped with accurate, clear, and up-to-date information provided to them in a form that they can understand. Many issues on which they should be enabled to be involved in decision-making are deep and complex: without adequate briefing, young people can be easily confused and their participation is an embarrassment both for them and for the adults involved.

So, prior to any involvement in decision-making, adults have to be sure that information is provided to them in a familiar and appealing format. In Peace Child, we ensure this by supporting young people to create their own information in the form of books and musical plays: young people seem to relate well to materials created by their peers. Also, young people frequently simplify complex topics in a way that make them easier

for adults to understand. This is also important to attract the press and media that serve the youth market: dry press releases coming out of government offices on children's rights or environmental issues never get an airing in teen magazines, whereas materials produced by young people in a colourful format, frequently do get reviewed, and thus reach a wider audience, making the information current and interesting to the broad body of the younger generation.

XI. Democracy & other Ground Rules: A further lesson is that kids must adhere to democratic principles and established laws of fairness, respect for minorities, ethnic groups etc. If possible, they should be encouraged to do this intuitively without many specific rules. They must adhere to the principles of personal choice and democracy, secret ballots, equal time etc., to ensure a fair discussion. When that knowledge is not present, or present but not respected, you have *Lord of the Flies*.

Any one who has worked in school knows that it is silly to expect all children to be little angels. They are not. Discipline has to be constructed and agreed by the group. Again, this would seem to be obvious, but it is amazing how easy it is to be swayed in group meetings by one intelligent, articulate young person and forget that his/her views might not reflect those of the rest of the group. Offering the opportunity for taking votes, inviting a speaker to oppose each suggestion, giving the floor to younger people, and insisting on silence while they make their point - all these little disciplines make for a healthy working environment and one in which young people feel safer.

It is particularly important when working with international groups that include Americans. American kids are very articulate and fearless about speaking their minds - often because they are being invited to speak in English, their first language, where others are speaking in their second or third languages. It was therefore not unusual in Eastern Europe for Americans to come to dominate any discussion or improvisation. It took a real effort for them to understand that their approach to a *Peace Child* performance in the Czech Republic was completely the opposite to what their Czech hosts wanted. By insisting on democracy and respect for all minority views, a new approach emerged. The *Peace Child* plays performed there bore no relation to the "Fame"-style performances we had done in the USA: the Czech one was almost entirely based on

mime around the concept of the four elements - earth, air, fire and water - all of which combined to produce a Peace Child who would be the saviour of the earth. A wonderful concept, deeply moving for Czech and other audiences, but one that would never have emerged if the ground rules of democracy had not been observed at the meetings. Likewise a Peace Child based on a famous Hungarian folk tale, *Csongor and Tunde*, became the *Peace Child* performance in Hungary. It too was wonderful and it emerged through a combination of respect for the host's culture and a willingness to surrender control in pursuit of a greater democratic and cultural goal.

XII. Accountability: There has to be some way in which adults are accountable to kids for the participation that they offer to them. This relates to the principle of real power (III) and Democracy (XI) and it requires that there either be a monitoring body, some legal provision, or a commitment by the adults to honour their deal with the young people.

There are countless examples of adult researchers working with kids on different topics, taking up huge amounts of their time, and then the kids never hear what happened to their views, or see what was published. After the extensive media coverage of the Clwyd or Pin-down affairs in which children reported being abused by carers, researchers flocked in from universities around the world, forcing the children to explain most intimate details of their private lives. Then the researchers disappeared and the children never heard from them again.

In Manchester, the City Council set up an environmental forum amid great fanfare: hundreds of kids travelled in from different sections of the city and spent three days debating environmental issues and coming up with several ingenious proposals. The mayor received the proposals, but nothing then was heard by the kids.¹¹² As in all bureaucracies, the proposals were shelved: probably, nothing was going to be done. The council's intention was probably only to do a PR exercise.

I have already rehearsed the problem of the lack of follow-up to UN young people's conferences, but similar feelings of betrayal are common to many young people's projects. One child who came to Peace Child called it "learning by disillusion." It is perhaps impossible to legislate against this kind of betrayal because it is often budget driven and beyond the control of the adults to prevent. However, it is an important principle

and should be built in to every endeavour in the field of young people's participation.

In Peace Child, there has been plenty of disillusion, usually a result of failure to raise funds to meet the wishes of members of our network. However, in the doing of the plays and in the making of the book, the expectation is only that a book will be made or a play will be performed. As that expectation is always met, young people who participate in our programmes rarely feel betrayed and have never needed that process to ensure the accountability of Peace Child officers.

It exists, however. It is made very clear to every child participating in a Peace Child project that, if they sense that their feelings are being over-ruled or that they are being exploited in any way, they have the right to appeal directly to the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. The chair of the Trustees, Eirwen Harbottle, was one of the founders of Peace Child and she sees this role very seriously. She is the ultimate court of appeal for the children we are set up to serve. All adult officers are ultimately accountable to her and the other trustees, two of whom are under 25 years of age. This appeal process has never been invoked as all problems have been dealt with by the officers, but in the US foundation, there were complaints about a Peace Child play director who worked carefully with all the kids preparing a play through improvisations etc. then in the last instant went off and wrote exactly the play that he wanted, and cast one girl to sing all the best songs. The UK Trustees sent the US Board a letter expressing their distress at such a failure of loyalty to the Peace Child principles but it was probable not acted upon. Peace Child is a network, not an empire or a church: it cannot impose its will upon its national networks, but it can encourage and promote its principles. Several developing country Focal Points are guilty of similar self-serving manipulation of children. Such behaviour will always occur where there is a culture that does not really understand the meaning of children's participation and does not acknowledge that there is a technology of young people's participation contained in the principles outlined above. Thus, there has to be a process set up in any project through which young people can appeal to a superior body of people who can support their need for meaningful participation.

6.2 Conclusion

To return to the underlying philosophy mentioned in the first chapter - that children given responsibility tend to behave responsibly. Despite the Santa Cruz experience, the history of *Peace Child* does prove that philosophy to be viable. The hostel built by the 19-year old still stands; the books made by teams of 9-22 year olds, still sell. In 17 years of doing *Peace Child* shows, I never once used a prompter. If kids forgot their lines, as they did, they would cover for each other. They would take responsibility for each other.

They always got the job done. A famous example of this was the first Soviet American *Peace Child* performance in 1986. This was the time when we were trying to get Soviet children to the USA for the first time. The Soviet Ministry of Culture was implacably opposed to Russian children performing in a western rock musical, and even more implacably opposed to allowing the young performers to go to the United States. Eventually, the minister agreed to see an audition performance. The time was set for a Thursday afternoon. The children were supposed to arrive on the Saturday from the USA so they would have less than a week to write, rehearse and perform a whole new show - in Russian!! The minister spoke no English at all.

As luck would have it, the flight from the USA was turned back with engine trouble. By the time the US kids got to England, their charter to Moscow had left. They had to take a bus to Cardiff and finally got to Moscow dead tired on Sunday evening. Four days to the make-or-break audition. Rehearsals started on Monday morning with the kids introducing themselves and outlining their thoughts about what should be in the play. Then each demonstrated their talents, and split up into singing, dance and acting/writing groups. Each group then got on with their job. The Russian choreographer revealed himself to be an appallingly slow worker, having completed only half of one number by the end of the second day. One of the kids took over by mutual agreement, and seven numbers were up and running by Wednesday night. The songs were learned, but there will still some gaps in the story, so it was decided to narrate part of the second act. Apart from that, the show was complete and the US kids were speaking their lines in passable Russian.

The Minister attended the performance and, though we heard later that he had been instructed by Gorbachev to allow the production to go

ahead, he was visibly moved. He explained, with tears in his eyes, that one of his grand-children had been born with Downs syndrome, and much of his life was now taken up with finding out what that young person was capable of doing. The children's show had inspired him and he was happy to take the decision himself to give the production a green light.

So the kids delivered: they conquered tiredness, an impossible deadline, and working conditions that would have made the most resilient theatrical performer fearful. The result was that a hardened Soviet bureaucrat's heart was melted and with it a substantial part of the hardness of the Iron Curtain. They proved their ability to behave and perform responsibly. However, evidence of young people's irresponsibility abounds in other fields: it remains a job for further research to unearth how the granting of responsibility to young people works out in other disciplines and activities.

REFERENCES

113. Woolcombe et al, Mission Made Possible, PCI, 1996;
114. Lansdown, G. Taking Part (IPPR 1995)
115. Reported by Julian Cottendon, the teacher who set up the Student Council at Newport Free Grammar School; corroborated by the Headmaster and Daniel Andrews, student;
116. Peace Child's Progress, Volume IV, No 3, September 1985, Page 1
117. Symonds, G. The World in 2012, World Wide Fund for Nature, 1995:

Chapter Seven

THE NEED FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

This thesis was originally designed as a preface to a wider international study for a Doctoral Thesis and PhD. The effort has convinced this researcher that the wider study of the different forms of young people's participation in local governance is urgently needed. Jones and Wallace, Lansdowne, Coles and Hart all call for broader international study so that comparisons may be made amongst the experience of different countries. The occasion of the Austrian presidency of the EU, with that country's commitment to participation, may be the occasion to do such research. It is important that such research should be undertaken in close partnership with young people themselves.¹¹⁸ Only in this way will the real experience of young people emerge and - as in the UNICEF UK report on the implementation of children's rights - the voice of young people will bring intelligence and reality to what is happening in the rest of the world.

Academic discipline and supervision is essential: within all the studies reported in the preparation of this thesis, there is a laziness in the reporting of facts and no searching pursuit of methodologies for young people's participation. Simply rehearsing the legal instruments and citing researches by others does not do justice to the subject: there has to be a real teasing out of principles, experience, best practice and techniques which governments and institutions can follow.

6.1 The Plateau of Experience

The idea of a permanent infrastructure for the involvement of young people in governance, like that outlined in the Rescue Mission book,¹¹⁴ is probably an unrealistic dream. In Peace Child, we have opted for incremental progress towards such an ideal - with ideas like the setting up of a young people's information dissemination centre at the United Nations - giving young people a home at the heart of the UN. The more that young people can demonstrate their responsibility in matters of global importance, the more governments and others may be willing to grant them more responsibility.

In the UK, as in Peace Child, we have reached a plateau of experience. In most areas of public life, the argument about the benefits of

young people's participation have been won, but, as Lansdown said in an interview¹¹⁵, we have yet to establish acceptance for the idea of young people's participation in the public mind. For the British public, young people remain a sector of society that should be seen and not heard. Lansdown feels what is needed is a massive public campaign, around an issue like anti-smacking. She reported that, in Sweden prior to the introduction of anti-smacking legislation in 1979, opinion was evenly divided on the issue with about 50 per cent thinking it was a parent's inalienable right to hit their child. (In the UK, polls show that about 70 per cent of British parents feel it is their right to smack their child.) Alongside the introduction of the legislation, the Swedish government ran a massive publicity campaign, highlighting the facts that we all know, like how the use of violence on children breeds violent adults, how it contravenes basic human rights etc. - and the Swedish public was convinced. There were one or two prosecutions under the new laws, then the number of cases dried up almost completely. The public had taken children's rights to its heart, and now Sweden is doing as much as any government to defend children's rights abroad, taking up for example the cause of prosecuting European paedophiles who abuse children in South East Asia.

Could a similar transformation happen here in England? Possibly. The Thompson Report stated unequivocally: "What is required is experience of such a kind that young people learn to claim their right to influence the society in which they live and have a say in how it is run."¹¹⁶ That is government policy and in almost every case where it has been implemented, it has born fruit. Yet still the British public feel that children are a problem, that there is a generation gap, that children need to be smacked, that "mother knows best" and children should do what they're told. How can one move from the plateau of experience to a world where young people are seen as active, responsible partners in the development of society?

British society is not likely to have a sudden conversion on the subject. Thus the only way is to keep advancing the local government and young people's service initiatives which have proved successful already. It may be possible to extend these into business and non-profit organisations - though one early attempt to persuade Marks & Spencers to set up a children's Board met with tough resistance from the staff, who were upset when the children expressed strong distaste for a care-

fully planned children's clothing line. There is always likely to be resistance from those whose salaries depend on deciding things for children. However, such initiatives must be promoted if young people are to transcend their culture of exclusion.

A second channel is to vigorously campaign for changes in the law to enable the full provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to be prosecuted through the courts. Only in this way can children prevent the worst excesses of non-European culture being visited upon them - as in the cases of children being returned to the countries of their parents birth for child marriages, genital mutilation and, sometimes, bonded labour. Comprehensive anti-smacking legislation needs to be introduced and stronger measures to give children rights within their own schools. A right to enable student representatives to sit on School Boards of Governors would be a good start.

Alongside these legal and administrative provisions, there must be a wide-scale promotional campaign, and in this, children are perhaps our best allies. One effective way of doing this is through dramas like *Peace Child*. In one scene that turns up in most performances, the Security Council or City Board are finally persuaded to meet to discuss the children's proposals. The children are allowed to watch as the diplomats make their opening statements - as bland as they are obstructive to the desired outcome. When the adults take a coffee break, the children move gingerly to their desks. They are appalled to read the briefing notes in which each delegate has been told by their governments not to give an inch on certain issues. The children sit down at the government chairs and, in the five minute coffee break, sort out most of the problems that the Security Council planned to take three weeks to fail to resolve. Such performance pieces can inject into the mind of an audience the potential for active young people's involvement in important issues.

It will require many more similar pieces of promotion to make the public aware of the potential. One new organisation set up in the UK to promote young people's participation is Article 12. Its mandate is to promote Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the child and it is entirely run by young people with sponsorship from the Rowntree Foundation the National Children's Society and the Children's Rights Centre. It has just begun its work, so it remains to be seen if it will make an impact. But its existence is an example of the open-ness of central

British child-serving agencies to take the issue of child participation seriously.

6.2 Avenues for Further Study

An important avenue for further study is to examine closely those areas where children and young people fail to deliver or to act responsibly. I have had little experience of this, but I am aware of one baffling example and there must be others. For several years, I have observed the CSD Youth Working Group proving incapable of organising itself. In 1996, after the UN had set up a useful Young people's Session and organised a Steering Committee to make it work, the young people elected a Japanese girl to be their administrator. It was a strange choice predicated on the thought that she might be able to raise a lot of Japanese money for young people in the developing world. It did not happen: the girl had apparently lied about her position in her parent group, and was later revealed to have a mental condition which caused her to be institutionalised.

Efforts by Rescue Mission were rebuffed by other young people's groups who favour a "young people-only" approach to young people's group organisation. They do not accept adults like this author working in partnership with them so any recommendations to appoint an effective administrator fell on deaf ears. At the end of the Earth Summit Review session in June 1995, the Youth Group still had not organised itself to propose a workable administrative structure with the result that they lost all respect that they ever had in the UN, and amongst government delegations.

So a struggle continues even amongst young people themselves as to the nature of the responsibilities that they wish to take on. Inevitably, there will be mistakes and young people will fail to deliver - though the one described above is a natural failure of the young people to respect the support offered by older people. Breaking the basic principles or ground rules will inevitably result in failure, but there has to be far more research and fine-tuning of these principles before they can be put out as matters of certainty for practitioners.

Another avenue to be explored is the idea of defining a specific role for young people within the democratic structures of society. That role

could be the guarding of the long-term interests of the environment, and the sustainability, of the planet. This will give young people a truly responsible role in society. Can it be mandated? Indigenous societies in North America are required to make all decisions with a view to seven generations hence. It is unrealistic to expect democracies to do the same, but empowering children to look at the long-term prospects for planetary survival and speak out for the interests of their own generation, and the generation yet unborn, could give a boost to the crucial concept of sustainable development, which currently only finds advocates amongst specialised agencies of the United Nations and other international development bodies.

This thesis has provided sufficient examples that the idea of partnership - of sharing power and responsibility between adults and young people along the lines of the principles outlined above - does work. With more research, more evidence will be unearthed to support the partnership approach - from other local initiatives, from indigenous tribes in the developing world, and from the social structures of a variety of different cultures.

At its best, the case is proven that children are no longer citizens in waiting. They are no longer to be seen and not heard. They are lively, potentially crucial contributors to the life and vigour of society, a source of ideas and energy and fun. The few instances of success described in this study are but trickles through chinks in that dam which holds back that vast reservoir of energy and ideas that young people can release into society. Evidence suggests that it is no longer possible to hold back those ideas. A controlled opening of the flood-gates, and a careful planning of the run-off channels is what is now required.

REFERENCES

118. The Peace Child International network of young people in some 120 countries is well-placed to do such research. A proposal is currently being circulated to governments and various key academic research bureaux to enable such research to happen.
119. Thompson, Lord. Effective Youth Participation in the Youth Service. HMSO, 1982, Page 48

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN GOVERNANCE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Advisory Centre on Education, Student Responsibilities,
Occasional Papers No. 16, January, 1992
- ANACEJ, Newsletters, 1991-96
- Brown, L. et al., State of the World Reports, Norton, 1987 - 1997
- Brundtland et al., Our Common Future, Oxford, 1987
- Children of the World, Rescue Mission : Planet Earth, Kingfisher, 1994
- Coles, R., Youth and Social Policy, UCL Press, 1995
- Devon Youth Council Constitution, Devon County Council, 1994;
- The Ecologist, Whose Common Future, Earthscan, 1993
- Geneva City Council, International Children's Conference Report,
July, 1995;
- Government of Austria, Preliminary Report on Observance of
Convention on the Rights of the Child, Vienna, 1997
- Government of China, China Agenda 21, Peoples Press, 1994
- Gulbenkian, C., Effective Government Structures for Children,
Gulbenkian, 1996,
- Hampshire County Council, Totally Excellent Parish Council
Handbook, 1994
- Harris, R.M., Social Security and the Transition to Adulthood,
Journal of Social Policy, Volume VII, No 3, September, 1988
- Hart, R., Children's Participation, Earthscan, 1997;
- Hart, R., From Tokenism to Partnership, UNICEF Innocenti Papers, 1996
- Hill, J. et al., Listening to Smaller Voices, ActionAid, March, 1995; Jones,
G. & Wallace, C., Youth Family & Citizenship, Open University, 1992
- Joyce, G., Taking the Wraps of Participation, Youth Clubs UK, 1990
- Kids Meeting Kids, Children's Summit Statement, September, 1990:
- Lane, P., Victorian Age, Batsford, 1972
- Lansdown, G., Taking Part, IPPR, 1996
- Marshall, T.H., Citizenship and Social Class, Cambridge University
Press, 1950
- Merseyside Education Authority, Interim Report, 1988
- Mill, J. S., On Liberty and other essays, Oxford University Press 1991
- Peace Child Members, Peace Child Priorities 1989, 1990, 1991;
- Pines, D., Review of Youth Action Councils, Dept. of Health and
Social Security, Washington DC, 1992;
- Ramphal, S., Our Global Neighbourhood, Oxford, 1995
- Reebok Centre for Human Rights Reports, 1993-97
- Rees K. & Wackernagel R., Our Ecological Footprints,
New Society Publishers, 1996
- Rescue Mission members, Rescue Mission Action Updates,
PCI, 1992-1996
- Rutter, M.E., Fifteen Thousand Hours, London Open Books, 1979
- Smith, S., Journey to the Soviet Union, Little Brown, 1985
- South Derbyshire, County Council Review, June, 1991
- Storgaard, O., Report to World Bank South Asia Dept., April, 1997
- Symonds, G., The World in 2012, World Wide Fund for Nature, 1995

- Thompson, Lord, Effective Youth Participation in the Youth Service, HMSO, 1982
- Turner, G., Citizenship and Cooperation, Allen & Unwin, 1990
- United Nations, Agenda 21 Programme of Action for Sustainable Development, UN Publications, 1992
- United Nations, Blue Book VII The United Nations and Human Rights 1945-'95, UN Publications, 1995
- United Nations, Beijing Platform for Women 1995:
- United Nations, Cairo Final Statement 1994;
- United Nations, Copenhagen Declaration 1995;
- United Nations, Habitat II Declaration 1996;
- United Nations, International Year of Youth Declaration, August 1985;
- United Nations, Vienna Declaration 1993;
- United Nations, World Programme of Action for Youth through the year 2000 and Beyond, December, 1995
- UNICEF, World Declaration and Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, United Nations, 1990
- UN DPCSD, Youth Intersessional Programme, May '95 to April '96;
- UNEP, GYF Youth Statement to Rio Earth Summit, 1992;
- UNEP, Leave it to Us Conference Report, June, 1997;
- UNEP, Global Youth Forum Report, UNEP, 1995;
- UNICEF, Major Speeches to the World Summit for Children, 1991
- UNICEF, Children's Referenda, Quito, Ecuador, 1990;
- UNICEF, State of the World's Children Reports, Oxford University Press, 1987 - 1997
- Coalition of Children for the Earth, Vermont Declaration, August 1990
- Vitousek, P., Stanford University Review, 1986
- White, P., Spotlight on Citizenship, Save The Children, 1995
- Willow, C., Hear Hear, LGIU, February, 1997
- Woolcombe, D., Peace Child Study Guide for Schools, Peace Child Foundation, 1983;
- Woolcombe, D., et al, Mission Made Possible, Peace Child International, 1996;
- Woolcombe et al., Rescue Mission Board Meeting Reports
- Woolcombe, D., Special Focus Report on Youth, Rio+5 Report, Earth Council, 1997
- Woolcombe, D. et al., Peace Child's Progress Newsletters, 1983-89

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CME	Conseil Municipal des Enfants
CSD	Commission for Sustainable Development
GYF	Global Youth Forum
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
NACY	National Association of Children and Youth
U5MR	Under Five Mortality Rate
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UN DPCSD	United Nations Department of Political Coordination and Sustainable Development

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EUROPEAN RESEARCH

This questionnaire has been prepared to distribute amongst councillors, teachers, students and school officials in European towns and cities that are attempting to include young people in their decision-making processes. It is being done as part of a European Union project related to Local Agenda 21, managed by the Eurocities project in partnership with Peace Child International. Councillors, teachers, school officials and students are invited to photocopy and distribute as many copies as they are able, and return them with a covering letter explaining what they have done to:

David Woolcombe, Peace Child International, The White House,

BUNTINGFORD, Herts UK, SG9 9AH

In multiple choice answers, 1 = YES! I totally Agree; 6 = NO! I totally Disagree; please circle the number that most closely matches your reaction to the question.

I. QUESTIONS TO COUNCILLORS:

1. Does your council have a Young people's Council? YES / NO

If NO, continue to Question 2; if YES - please circle

- Our Young people's Council has been a wonderful asset! 1 2 3 4 5 6
- I can point to 1 2 3 4 5 6 initiatives that would not have happened without them!
- They always surprise us with a fresh perspective on council business; 1 2 3 4 5 6
- They act as a conscience for the council, reminding us of our duty to the future, eg. to the environment 1 2 3 4 5 6
- They always follow up debate with Action: 1 2 3 4 5 6
- They have been a huge pain and obstacle to effective council business: 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The Young people's Council has been a total waste of time and money & should be dismantled as soon as possible 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The members of the Young people's Council were selected through -

- school elections
- Neighbourhood elections
- adult appointment
- other means: (please explain)

.....
.....
.....

2. If you have no young people’s council, what are the reasons?

- the idea hasn’t been presented to Council 1 2 3 4 5 6

We have considered the idea but have rejected it because -

- it would be too expensive 1 2 3 4 5 6
- we disagree philosophically with young people’s participation:
1 2 3 4 5 6
- we feel it would waste young people’s time: 1 2 3 4 5 6
- we tried it but found it unworkable: YES / NO
- the Council voted against the idea, no reason given: YES / NO

We’d like to have a young people’s council and are waiting for the right moment, the right people and the right formula to launch it:

1 2 3 4 5 6

We are waiting for stronger pressure from young people themselves to indicate that they would actually like such a council YES / NO

II. QUESTIONS TO TEACHERS:

1. Have you experience of students who have served on Municipal or School Young people’s Councils YES / NO

If NO, proceed straight to Question 4; If YES, did you find -

- that students who participated were generally more successful in examinations than those who were not? 1 2 3 4 5 6
- that students who participated were generally more responsible and better behaved than those who were not 1 2 3 4 5 6
- that students who participated were more motivated to learn and better contributors than those who were not 1 2 3 4 5 6

4. If there is no Student Council, did you

- ever try to create one? YES / NO
- If yes, why did it not succeed?
 - staff resistance 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - principals resistance 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - student disinterest 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - outlawed by Trustees/governors 1 2 3 4 5 6
- ever discuss the idea with students? YES / NO
- think your teaching could be improved by one? 1 2 3 4 5 6

III. QUESTIONS TO SCHOOL OFFICIALS:

5. Do you promote the setting up of School Councils in the schools of your district/city? [most strongly] 1 2 3 4 5 6 [not at all]

- Do you have evidence that school councils contribute positively to the life of your school? 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The whole student body benefits from the presence of a student council not just the students involved: 1 2 3 4 5 6
- My/Our job is made much easier as the students take many tasks off our hands 1 2 3 4 5 6

IV. QUESTIONS TO THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES:

[These questions are taken from the NACY's participation sub-committee questionnaire prepared for International Youth Year Groups and Local Young people's Councils. Responses will be compared to their control groups.]

6. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF PARTICIPATION?

Which of the following phrases come close to your ideas about participation? Choose as many as you think appropriate:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| a. Getting involved | j. influencing local events |
| b. having a say | k. changing society |
| c. taking responsibility | l. being accepted as an adult |
| d. Getting power | m. using your brains |
| e. Being consulted | n. being trusted |
| f. Taking sole charge | o. taking over from adults |
| g. Having your ideas accepted by adults | p. working alongside adults |
| h. having your ideas accepted by young people | |
| i. changing organisations | q. training to be a leader |

7. EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATION:

In which of the following circumstances have you been given a real chance to participate?

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| a. In your close family | j. In an outing / expedition |
| b. In your wider family | k. In planning a cooperative |
| c. In school | l. In managing a budget |
| d. In College | m. in serving on a committee |
| e. On a training programme | n. In making a staff appoint |
| f. In any paid employment | o. In writing a report |
| g. In any unpaid employment | p. In planning a campaign |
| h. In your trade union | q. In lobbying politicians |
| l. In a Young people's Club or project | |

8. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION? Have any instance(s) of participation changed you in any of the following ways?

- a. increased your knowledge?
- b. Increased your skills?
- c. Increased your confidence?
- d. Helped you be more effective in giving your point of view?
- e. Helped you persuade others to your point of view?
- f. Made you have more respect for points of view that differ from yours?
- g. Made you see the value of deciding things by committees
- h. Made you doubt the value of deciding things by committees
- l. Given you a better appreciation of the value of money
- j. Increased your concern about the shortage of money to do things which need doing
- k. Given you a greater interest in raising finance for causes you want to support
- l. Made you more skillful in dealing with a range of adults
- m. Made your more skillful in dealing with persons and organisations in authority
- n. Strengthened your wish to change society
- o. caused greater frustration with situations you have found it difficult to influence
- p. Lessened your respect for adults
- q. Made you appreciate the responsibility that adults have
- r. Convinced you that today's society is worse that you thought
- s. Convinced you that today's society is better (eg. more caring) than you thought

- t. Convinced you that those in authority are
 - i. ill-informed
 - ii. intolerant
 - iii. incompetent
- u. Convinced that those in authority are the opposite of i, ii, iii.

9. PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION AND NECESSARY STEPS: Indicate which of the following you consider are vital to achieve good participation

- a. You cannot have genuine participation unless young people democratically agree what steps should be taken to introduce participation:
- b. Any measure leading to greater participation is useful - it is not necessary to "go the whole hog" at one time;
- c. Small moves towards participation are useless: young people should not agree to be involved unless really significant changes are proposed.
- d. People chosen to sit on committees should be elected by young people not selected by adults;
- e. It is best for adults to select young people to be on committees
- f. All decision-making bodies of organisations involving young people should include young people
- g. It is worth starting with one young person's representative on each committee;
- h. On any decision-making committee, at least one third of the members should be young people;
- i. On any decision-making committee, at least half the members should be young people;
- j. It is right that young people should graduate to more responsibility only by proving themselves
- k. In order to introduce genuine participation, adults must stand wholly on one side and let young people carry tasks through;
- l. It is essential to the success of participation that young people and adults work together positively
- m. Young people need training before they can be given greater responsibility;
- n. It does not matter what strings are attached: Young people should accept all increases in responsibility offered to them;
- o. Young people should not accept responsibility unless they are fully consulted, and accept, the terms on which it is offered.

- p. Young people should not accept responsibility in organisations unless they accept the organisation's policies as a whole.
- q. It is alright to accept responsibility in organisations whose policies you do not agree with because they can be changed
- r. Young people with responsibility should act differently to adults
- s. Young people with responsibility should not be afraid to act in the same way as adults
- t. Change and participation do not necessarily go together
- u. Young people should use opportunities for participation to seek major changes in the society.
- v. The best first step towards participation is attitude change
- w. The best first step towards participation is practical measures whether or not there is attitude change.

10. BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION: what barriers do you think exist to the effective introduction of participation??

- a. Young people are not interested
- b. Young people lack confidence
- c. Adults wish to retain responsibility and power
- d. Young people have no access to the information they need to help them participate effectively.
- e. The rules of organisations do not give sufficient opportunity for young people to become involved in decision-making.
- f. The rules do not allow young people to handle money
- g. Young people do not work effectively in committee procedures
- h. The language used by adults is different from that used by young people - there are problems of communication
- i. Not enough training is given to young people to help them participate
- j. Not enough advice or training is given to adults to help them facilitate participation

David R. Woollcombe,

31st March 1998

(33,843 words)

